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STORIES OF KING ARTHUR

From Malory and Tennyson

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R. S. BATE



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NOTE

THE text of Malory which has been followed (with certain deviations) is that of the "Temple Classics" edition, for leave to use which the publishers are indebted to the courtesy of Messrs. Dent.

It has not been thought necessary to observe Caxton's division into chapters.

No attempt has been made to explain Malory's factitious Geography except in the case of names which can be identified with some probability.

The extracts from Tennyson are from the original editions: for the *Morte D'Arthur* the version of 1842 has been followed, and for *Elaine* and *Guinevere*, the *Idylls of the King*, 1st edn. 1859. The punctuation has been slightly altered.

R. S. B.

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INTRODUCTION

WHETHER King Arthur ever really lived we cannot say. There were legends of him in Strathclyde, in South Wales, and in the South West of England—how he defeated the victorious Saxons, the Romans, the heathen Picts from beyond the wall—all the enemies known to the Britons; how he became a great conqueror, and ruled a vast territory; how at last, after a hard-fought battle he passed mysteriously, but should come again and lead his Britons to victory once more. But other nations too have sought consolation for defeat and disaster in the thought of past glories, and have looked with a pathetic trust for the return of some dead hero. History at least tells us nothing certain. In the sixth century an old monk, Gildas, mentions the defeat of the Saxons at Mount Badon (said to be Badbury, in Dorsetshire); but he does not speak of Arthur. By the ninth century the one battle had become twelve, that of Mount Badon being the last; and in all these the British king, Arthur, was victorious. But it is not certain whether the war was in the North or in the South of England. There are similar stories in Brittany also, and it is doubtful whether the legend originated there or in

Britain. At last in 1126 Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Welsh Bishop, began to put the legends into shape. He wrote in Latin a History of the British Kings, which he said was founded on a Breton history that had come into his hands, and he told the story of Arthur, among other kings; but there is no Round Table in his book, and Lancelot does not yet appear. The tale went on growing, and when Wace, a native of Jersey, turned Geoffrey's history into French verse he made additions here and there, and introduced the Round Table, which by that time formed a part of several legends. Then other stories were worked in, though they had little to do with Arthur, and we hear of Tristram and Iseult, and of Lancelot, who plays a great part in the story, as we have it now. When men's thoughts turned to the Holy Land at the time of the Crusades, heathen knights, Saracens from the East, like Sir Palamedes, begin to move across the stage; and as religion gained greater importance in people's lives, the story got in the Legend of the Holy Grail a religious element, so that it was no longer a mere tale of fighting. Next Layamon, a priest who lived in Worcestershire on the bank of the Severn, told the tale all over again, and made his English poem, the *Brut*, twice as long as Wace's French version; and many other writers, mainly French, told parts of the same story or other kindred stories. Later, Sir Thomas Malory took up the tale, and wrote it in English prose, putting it together, with a certain amount of arrangement, out of the materials he found in various writers, whom he does not name, but refers to them as "the French book." He describes for us a good deal of the manners and customs of his own time, but the actors in his story are Arthur and his

knights. Malory's book was finished about 1470—one of the first books to be written in such English as we can still understand, and it was one of the first books printed in England, for Caxton himself printed it in 1485. Lastly Lord Tennyson put some of the tales from Malory into English verse, and made a kind of allegory of it; King Arthur being now not merely a warrior, but an image of the soul of man, which, after a life-long struggle with sin and evil, passes to its rest, just as Guenever represents the flesh, which sins and suffers and repents. Of Sir Thomas Malory we know nothing except what he tells us himself at the end of his book, which, he says, "was ended the ninth year of King Edward the Fourth by Sir Thomas Maleore, knight, as Jesu help him for his great might, as he is the servant of Jesu both day and night." Some have thought from this that he was a priest; all we can be sure of is what he tells us—that he was a knight, and that he wrote *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson was born in 1809 at Somersby, in Lincolnshire, of which his father was Rector. Alfred was the fourth in a family of twelve, which included in his elder brothers, Frederick and Charles, two other poets of great merit, though overshadowed by him. Frederick went to Eton; Charles and Alfred went to Louth Grammar School, and in 1827 all three were together at Trinity College, Cambridge. In 1850 Alfred married Miss Emily Sellwood, to whom he had been attached for many years. They lived near London; and after three years moved to Freshwater, in the Isle of Wight. Later the poet built another house, at Haslemere, in Surrey, and thenceforth divided the year between his two homes, spending the winter in the Island. He succeeded

Wordsworth as Poet Laureate in the year of his marriage. His Idylls of the King, twelve in number, were published at various times, from 1859 to 1885. In 1884 he was made a peer; and he died at his Surrey house on October 6, 1892.

PART I

MALORY

SELECTIONS FROM THE MORTE D'ARTHUR

CHAPTER I

Of Arthur's birth, and how he became King.

Stuff, victual; **garnish**, equip; **hight**, was called; **pight**, pitched; **appurtenance**, that which belongs to a thing; **worshipfully**, honourably; or day, before day; **scripture**, writing; **let make**, caused to be made; **jousts**, encounters of knights in pairs, while a **tournament** is a *mêlée*; **All Hallowmas**, All Saints' Day, Nov. 1; **mastery**, great feat; **betaken**, engaged; **dole**, sorrow; **Candlemas**, the Feast of the Purification, Feb. 2; **cried mercy**, asked forgiveness; **obaisance**, obedience; **wait upon**, watch.

Note that the subject to the verb, when a pronoun, is often omitted.

It befell in the days of Uther Pendragon when he was king of all England, that there was a mighty duke in Cornwall that held war against him, and the duke was called the Duke of Tintagil. And the King sent him plain word, and badē him be ready and stuff him and garnish him, for within forty days he would fetch him out of the biggest castle that he had. When the Duke had this warning, anon he went and furnished and garnished two strong castles of his, of the which the one hight Tintagil, and the other castle hight Terrabil. So his wife, Dame Igraine, he put in the castle of Tintagil, and himself he put in the castle of Terrabil, the which had many issues and posterns out. Then in all haste came Uther with a great host, and laid a siege about the castle of Terrabil. And there he pight many pavilions, and there was great war

made on both parties, and much people slain. And the Duke of Tintagil issued out of the castle by night at a postern for to have distressed the King's host, but was himself slain.

Then all the barons by one assent prayed the King of accord betwixt the Lady Igraine and him; the King gave them leave, for fain would he have been accorded with her. So the King put all the trust in Sir Ulfus, a noble knight, to entreat between them. So at the last the King and she met together. Now will we do well, said Sir Ulfus, it were great joy unto us all an it might please the King to make her his queen. Unto that they all well accorded, and moved it to the King. And anon he assented thereto with good will, and so in all haste they were married in a morning, with great mirth and joy.

Now when the Queen was about to give birth to a son, Merlin came unto the King and said, Sir, ye must purvey you for the nourishing of your child. As thou wilt, said the King, so be it. Well, said Merlin, I know a lord that is a passing true man and a faithful; his name is Sir Ector; let him be sent for, and desire him, yourself, as he loveth you, that his wife nourish your child. And when the child is born, let it be delivered to me at yonder privy postern unchristened. So the child was delivered unto Merlin, and he bare it forth unto Sir Ector, and made an holy man to christen him, and named him Arthur; and so Sir Ector's wife nourished him as her own.

Then within two years King Uther fell sick of a great malady, so that three days and three nights he was speechless; wherefore all the barons made great sorrow, and asked Merlin what counsel were best. There is none other remedy, said Merlin, but God will have his will. But look ye be all before King Uther to-morn, and God and I shall make him to speak. So on the morn all the barons with Merlin came before the King. Then Merlin said aloud unto King Uther, Sir, shall your son Arthur be king after your days of this realm with all the appurtenance? Then Uther said in hearing of them all, I give him

God's blessing and mine and bid him pray for my soul, and righteously and worshipfully that he may claim the crown upon forfeiture of my blessing. And therewith he yielded up the 'ghost, and then was he interred as longed to a king. Wherefore the Queen, fair Igraine, made great sorrow, and all the barons. Then stood the realm in great jeopardy long while, for every lord that was mighty of men made him strong, and many weened to have been king. Then Merlin went to the Archbishop of Canterbury and counselled him for to send for all the lords of the realm and all the gentlemen of arms that they should to London come by Christmas, upon pain of cursing; and for this cause, that Jesus, that was born on that night, that he would of his great mercy show some miracle, as he was come to be king of mankind, for to show some miracle, who should be rightwise king of this realm. So in the greatest church of London all the estates were long or day in the church for to pray. And when matins and the first mass was done, there was seen in the churchyard against the high altar, a great stone four-square, and in the midst thereof was like an anvil of steel a foot on high, and therein stuck a fair sword, naked by the point, and letters there were, written in gold about the sword, that said thus; Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil is rightwise king of all England. Then the people marvelled, and told it to the Archbishop. So when all masses were done all the lords went to behold the stone and the sword. And when they saw the scripture, some essayed, such as would have been king, but none might stir the sword or move it. He is not here, said the Archbishop, that shall achieve the sword, but doubt not God will make him known. And upon New Year's Day the barons did make a jousts and a tournament; and this was ordained for to keep the lords and commons together, for the Archbishop trusted that God would make him known that should win the sword. So upon New Year's Day the barons rode unto the field, and Sir Ector also rode thither, and with him Sir Kay, his son, and

young Arthur; and Sir Kay was made knight at All Hallowmas afore. Now Sir Kay had left his sword at his father's lodging, and so he prayed young Arthur for to ride for it. I will well, said Arthur; but when he came home, the lady and all were out to see the jousting. Then Arthur said, I will ride to the churchyard, and take the sword that sticketh in the stone. So he came to the churchyard, and lightiy pulled the sword out of the stone, and rode his way to his brother and delivered him the sword. And as soon as Sir Kay saw the sword, he wist well it was the sword of the stone, and so he rode to his father Sir Ector, and said: Sir, lo here is the sword of the stone. When Sir Ector beheld the sword he returned again and came to the church, and there they alit all three and went into the church. And anon he made Sir Kay to swear upon a book how he came by that sword. Sir, said Sir Kay, by my brother Arthur, for he brought it to me. How gat ye this sword? said Sir Ector to Arthur. Sir, I will tell you. When I came home for my brother's sword I found no one at home to deliver me his sword, and so I came hither and pulled it out of the stone without any pain. Now, said Sir Ector to King Arthur, I understand ye must be king of this land. Wherefore I? said Arthur. Sir, said Ector, for God will have it so, for there should never man have drawn out this sword but he that shall be rightwise king of this land. Now let me see whether ye can put the sword there as it was and pull it out again. That is no mastery, said Arthur; and so he put it in the stone; therewithal Sir Ector essayed to pull out the sword, and failed. Now shall ye essay, said Sir Ector to Arthur. I will well, said Arthur, and pulled it out easily. And therewithal Sir Ector knelt down to the earth, and Sir Kay. Alas, said Arthur, my own dear father and brother, why kneel ye to me? And then Sir Ector told him all, how he was betaken for to nourish him, and by whose commandment. Then Arthur made great dole, when he understood that Sir Ector was not his father. Therewithal they went unto the Archbishop and told

him how the sword was achieved and by whom; and on Twelfth Day all the barons came thither, to essay to take the sword, who that would. But there afore them all there might none take it out but Arthur. And so they fell out at that time that it was put off till Candlemas, and then all the barons should there meet again. And right as Arthur did at Christmas he did at Candlemas, and pulled out the sword easily, whereof the barons were sore aggrieved, and put it off in delay till the high feast at Easter.¹ And as Arthur sped before, so did he at Easter, yet there were some of the lords had indignation that Arthur should be king, and put it off in a delay till the feast of Pentecost. And at that feast all manner of men essayed to pull at the sword that would essay, but none might prevail but Arthur, and pulled it out before all the lords and commons that were there, wherefore all the commons cried at once, We will have Arthur unto our king, we will put him no more in delay, for we all see that it is God's will that he shall be our king, and who that holdeth against it we will slay him. And therewith they all kneeled at once, both rich and poor, and cried Arthur mercy because they had delayed him so long, and Arthur forgave them and took the sword between both his hands and offered it upon the altar; and so was he made knight of the best man that was there. And so anon was the coronation made. And there was he sworn unto his lords and the commons for to be a true king, to stand with true justice from thenceforth the days of this life. And he let make Sir Kay seneschal of England, and Sir Baudwin of Britain was made constable, and Sir Ulfus was made chamberlain, and Sir Brastias was made warden to wait upon the north from Trent forwards, for it was that time the most part the King's enemies'. But within few years after, Arthur won all the north, Scotland, and all that were under their obeisance. Also Wales; a part of it held against Arthur, but he overcame them all, as he did the remnant, through the noble prowess of himself and his knights of the Round Table.

CHAPTER II

*How Arthur fought with Pellinore; and how the
Lady of the Lake gave him a sword.*

Truage, tribute; **other-else**, or else; **an**, if; **rede**, advise; **maugre**, in spite of; **defend**, resist, prevent; **dress**, set, make ready; **avall**, advantage; **cantels**, bits; **danger**, power; **me list**, I choose; **but**, unless; **rase**, cut; **worship**, honour; **wolkst**, knowest; to **go**, to walk; **no force**, no matter; **an I may**, if I can manage it; **samite**, a kind of silk, with gold or silver threads; **beseen**, provided.

AND within a little while came into the court twelve knights, and were aged men, and they came from the Emperor of Rome, and they asked of Arthur truage for this realm, other-else the Emperor would destroy him and his land. Well, said King Arthur, ye are messengers; therefore ye may say what ye will, other-else ye should die therefore. But this is mine answer: I owe the Emperor no truage, nor none will I hold him, but on a fair field I shall give him my truage, that shall be with a sharp spear or else with a sharp sword, and that shall not be long, by my father's soul, Uther Pendragon. And therewith the messengers departed, passing wroth. And King Arthur commanded that or it be day his best horse and armour, with all that longeth unto his person, be without the city or to-morrow day. Right so he mounted up and dressed his shield and rode a soft pâce till it was day, and then was he ware of three churls chasing Merlin and would have slain him. Then the king rode unto them, and bade them, Flee, churls! Then were they afraid when they saw a knight, and fled. O Merlin, said Arthur, here hadst thou been slain for all thy crafts, had I not been. Nay, said Merlin, not so, for I could save myself, an I would, and thou art more near thy death than I am, for thou goest to thy deathward, an **God be** not thy friend. So as they went thus talking they came to a fountain and a rich pavilion there by it.

Then King Arthur was ware where sat a knight, armed, in a chair. Sir knight, said Arthur, for what cause abidest thou here, that there may no knight ride this way but if he joust with thee? I rede thee leave that custom, said Arthur. This custom, said the knight, have I used and will use maugre who saith nay, and who is grieved at my custom let him amend it that will. I will amend it, said Arthur. I shall defend thee, said the knight. Anon he took his horse and dressed his shield and took a spear, and they met so hard either in other's shields that all to-shivered their spears. Therewith anon Arthur pulled out his sword. Nay, not so, said the knight; it is fairer, said the knight, that we twain run more together with sharp spears. I will well, said Arthur, an I had any more spears. I have enow, said the knight; so there came a squire and brought two good spears, and Arthur chose one and he another; so they spurred their horses and came together with all their might, that either brake their spears to their hands. Then Arthur set hand on his sword. Nay, said the knight, ye shall do better; ye are a passing good jouter as ever I met withal, and once for the love of the high order of knighthood let us joust once again. I assent me, said Arthur. Anon there were brought two great spears, and every knight gat a spear, and therewith they ran together that Arthur's spear all to-shivered. But the other knight hit him so hard in midst of the shield that horse and man fell to the earth, and therewith Arthur was eager, and pulled out his sword, and said, I will essay thee, sir knight, on foot, for I have lost the honour on horseback. I will be on horseback, said the knight. Then was Arthur wroth, and dressed his shield towards him with his sword drawn. When the knight saw that he alit, for him thought no worship to have a knight at such avail, he to be on horseback, and he on foot, and so he alit and dressed his shield unto Arthur. And there began a strong battle with many great strokes, and so hewed with their swords that the cantels flew in the fields, and much blood they bled both, that all the place as they

fought was overbled with blood, and thus they fought long, and rested them, and then they went to the battle again, and so hurtled together like two rams, that either fell to the earth. So at the last they smote together that both their swords met 'even together. But the sword of the knight smote King Arthur's sword in two pieces, wherefore he was heavy. Then said the knight unto Arthur, Thou art in my danger, whether me list to save thee or slay thee, and but thou yield thee as overcome and recreant, thou shalt die. As for death, said King Arthur, welcome be it when it cometh, but to yield me unto thee as recreant, I had rather die than to be so shamed. And therewithal the King leapt unto Pellinore and took him by the middle and threw him down and rased off his helm. When the knight felt that, he was afraid, for he was a passing big man of might, and anon he brought Arthur under him, and rased off his helm, and would have smitten off his head. Therewithal came Merlin, and said, Knight, hold thy hand, for an thou slay that knight thou putttest this realm in the greatest damage that ever was realm; for this knight is a man of more worship than thou wottest of. Why, who is he? said the knight. It is King Arthur. Then would he have slain him for dread of his wrath, and heaved up his sword; and therewith Merlin cast an enchantment to the knight, that he fell to the earth in a great sleep. Then Merlin took up King Arthur and rode forth on the knight's horse, and went unto an hermit that was a good man and a great leech. So the hermit searched all his wounds and gave him good salves; so the King was there three days, and then were his wounds well amended that he might ride and go, and so departed. And as they rode Arthur said, I have no sword. No force, said Merlin; hereby is a sword that shall be yours, an I may. So they rode till they came to a lake, the which was a fair water and broad, and in the midst of the lake Arthur was ware of an arm clothed in white samite, that held a fair sword in the hand. Lo, said Merlin, yonder is that sword that I spake

of. With that they saw a damosel going upon the lake. What damosel is that? said Arthur. That is the lady of the lake, said Merlin; and within that lake is a rock, and therein is as fair a place as any on earth, and richly beseen, and this damosel will come to you anon, and then speak ye fair to her, that she will give you that sword. Anon withal came the damosel unto Arthur and saluted him, and he her again. Damosel, said Arthur, what sword is that that yonder the arm holdeth above the water? I would it were mine, for I have no sword. Sir Arthur, King, said the damosel, that sword is mine, and if ye will give me a gift when I ask it you ye shall have it. By my faith, said Arthur, I will give ye what gift ye will ask. Well, said the damosel, go ye into yonder barge and row yourself to the sword, and take it and the scabbard with you, and I will ask my gift when I see my time. So Sir Arthur and Merlin alit, and tied their horses to two trees, and so they went into the ship, and when they came to the sword that the hand held, Sir Arthur took it up by the handles and took it with him, and the arm and the hand went under the water. And so they came unto the land, and rode forth; and then Sir Arthur looked on the sword and liked it passing well. Whether liketh you better, said Merlin, the sword or the scabbard? Me liketh better the sword, said Arthur. Ye are more unwise, said Merlin, for the scabbard is worth ten of the sword, for whiles ye have the scabbard upon you ye shall never lose no blood, be ye never so sore wounded; therefore keep well the scabbard always with you. So they rode unto Caerleon, and by the way they met with Sir Pellinore; but Merlin had done such a craft that Pellinore saw not Arthur, and he passed by without any words. I marvel, said Arthur, that the knight would not speak. Sir, said Merlin, he saw you not, for an he had seen you ye had not lightly departed. So they came unto Caerleon, whereof his knights were passing glad. And when they heard of his adventures, they marvelled that he would jeopard his person alone. But all men of worship said it was merry to be under such a

chieftain, that would put his person in adventure, as other poor knights did.

CHAPTER III

Of Arthur's marriage ; and how he made ready for war with Rome.

Vallant, worthy ; loth to **return**, *i.e.* to turn away ; **faute**, come short by ; **what** by water, partly by water ; **sieges**, seats ; **two sieges were void**, probably eight and twenty is a mistake for eight and forty ; **effect**, purport ; **Lucius**, an imaginary Emperor. The Western Empire was at an end by 480 A.D. ; **domineth upon**, holds sway over ; **set nothing of**, care nothing for ; **pretend**, claim ; **delibered**, resolved ; **disperpled**, scattered : **utas** of **Hilary**, octave or eighth day after the feast of S. Hilary, Jan. 13 ; **Burgoyne**, Burgundy ; **Little Britain**, Brittany ; **arrest**, detain ; **cogge**, cockboat ; **dromounde**, a war-ship.

It fell on a time King Arthur said to Merlin, My barons will let me have no rest but needs I must take a wife, and I will none take but by thy counsel. It is well done, said Merlin, that ye take a wife. Now is there any that ye love more than another? Yea, said King Arthur, I love Guenever, the daughter of the King Leodegrance, of the land of Cameliard, the which holdeth in his house the Table Round that ye told he had of my father Uther. And this damosel is the most valiant and fairest lady that I know living, or yet that ever I could find. Sir, said Merlin, as of her beauty and fairness she is one of the fairest on live, but, an ye loved her not so well as ye do, I should find you a damosel of beauty and of goodness that should like you and please you, an your heart were not set ; but there as a man's heart is set he will be loth to return. That is truth, said King Arthur. Then Merlin desired of the King for to have men with him that should enquire of Guenever, and so the King granted him, and Merlin went forth unto King Leodegrance, of Cameliard, and told him of the desire of the King that he would have unto his wife Guenever, his daughter. That is to me, said King Leodegrance,

the best tidings that ever I heard, that so worthy a king of prowess and noblesse will wed my daughter. And as for my lands, I will give him, wist I it might please him, but he hath lands enow; him needeth none; but I shall send him a gift shall please him much more, for I shall give him the Table Round, the which Uther Pendragon gave me, and when it is full complete there is an hundred knights and fifty. And as for an hundred good knights I have myself, but I faute fifty, for so many have been slain in my days. And so Leodegrance delivered his daughter Guenever unto Merlin, and the Table Round with the hundred knights; and so they rode freshly, with great royalty, what by water and what by land, till that they came nigh unto London.

When King Arthur heard of the coming of Guenever and the hundred knights, with the Table Round, then King Arthur made great joy for her coming, and that rich present, and said openly, This fair lady is passing welcome unto me, for I have loved her long, and therefore there is nothing so lief to me. And these knights with the Round Table please me more than right great riches. And in all haste the King let ordain for the marriage and the coronation in the most honourable wise that could be devised. Now, Merlin, said King Arthur, go thou and espy me in this land fifty knights which be of most prowess and worship. Within short time Merlin had found such knights that should fulfil eight and twenty knights, but no more could he find. Then the Bishop of Canterbury was fetched and he blest the sieges with great royalty and devotion, and there set the eight and twenty knights in their sieges. And when this was done Merlin said, Fair sirs, you must all arise and come to King Arthur for to do him homage; he will have the better will to maintain you. And so they arose and did homage; and when they were gone Merlin found in every siege letters of gold, that told the knights' names that had sitten therein. But two sieges were void. And so anon came young Gawain, and asked the King a gift. Ask, said the King, and

I shall grant it you. Sir, I ask that ye will make me knight the same day that ye shall wed fair Guenever. I will do it with a good will, said King Arthur, and do unto you all the worship that I may, for I must, by reason that you are my nephew, my sister's son.

And it fell on a day that King Arthur held a royal feast and Table Round, with his allies of kings, princes, and noble knights, all of the Round Table. And there came into his hall, he sitting in his throne royal, twelve ancient men, bearing each of them a branch of olive, in token that they came as ambassadors and messengers from the Emperor Lucius, which was called at that time Dictator of the public weal of Rome; which said messengers, after their entering and coming into the presence of King Arthur, did to him their obeisance, and said to him in this wise;—The high and mighty Emperor Lucius sendeth to the King of Britain greeting, commanding thee to acknowledge him for thy lord, and to send him the truage due of this realm unto the Empire, which thy father and other tofore, thy precessors, have paid, as is of record, and thou, as rebel, not knowing him as thy sovereign, withholdest and retainest contrary to the statutes and decrees made by the noble and worthy Julius Caesar, conqueror of this realm and first Emperor of Rome. And if thou refuse his demand and commandment, know thou for certain that he shall make strong war against thee and thy subjects, that it shall be ensample perpetual unto all kings and princes, for to deny their truage unto that noble empire which domineth upon the universal world. Then when they had showed the effect of their message the King commanded them to withdraw them, and said he should take advice of council and give to them an answer. Then some of the young knights, hearing this their message, would have run on them to have slain them, saying that it was a rebuke to all the knights there being present to suffer them to say so to the King. And anon the King commanded that none of them, upon pain of death, to mis-say them nor to do them any harm, and commanded a knight

to bring them to their lodging and see that they have all that is necessary and requisite for them, with the best cheer, and that no dainty be spared, for the Romans be great lords, and, though their message please me not nor my court, yet I must remember mine honour. After this the King let call all his lords and knights of the Round Table to counsel upon this matter, and desired them to say their advice. And then every man agreed to make war and to aid after their power. And when King Arthur understood their courages and good wills he thanked them heartily, and after let call the ambassadors to hear their answer, and he said to them in this wise;—I will that ye return to your lord; and say ye to him, Of his demand and commandment I set nothing, and that I know of no truage nor tribute that I owe to him, nor to none other prince, Christian nor heathen; but I pretend to have and to occupy the sovereignty of the empire, wherein I am entitled by the right of my predecessors, sometime kings of this land; and say to him that I am delibered and fully concluded to go with mine army with strength and power unto Rome, by the grace of God to take possession in the empire, and subdue them that be rebel. And then he commanded his treasurer to give them great and large gifts and to pay all their dispenses. And so they took their leave and departed, and journeyed until they came unto Lucius. And after the reverence made they made relation of their answer, like as ye before have heard. Well, said Lucius, before Easter I suppose to pass the mountains and so forth into France, and there bereave him his lands; and I shall send for them all that be subjects and allied to the Empire of Rome to come to mine aid. And thus Lucius came with all his host, which was disperpled sixty mile in breadth and commanded them to meet with him in Burgoyne, for he purposed to destroy the realm of Little Britain. Now leave we of Lucius the Emperor, and speak we of King Arthur, that commanded all them of his retinue to be ready at the utas of Hilary for to hold a Parliament at York. And at that

Parliament was concluded to arrest all the navy of the land, to be ready within fifteen days at Sandwich. And there he ordained two governors of this realm, that is to say, Sir Baudwin of Britain, for to counsel the best, and Sir Constantine, son to Sir Caçer of Cornwall, which after the death of Arthur was king of this realm; and after departed and entered into the sea at Sandwich with all his army, with a great multitude of ships, galleys, cogges, and dromoundes, sailing on the sea, and sailed till they arrived at Barflete in Flanders. And on the morn the King removed with his great battle and came unto Champagne and in a valley, and then they pight their tents; and the King being set at his dinner there came in two messengers and said that the Emperor was entered into France and had destroyed a great part, and was in Burgoyne, and had destroyed and made great slaughter of people, and burnt towns and boroughs; wherefore if thou come not hastily they must yield up their bodies and goods.

CHAPTER IV

How Arthur fought with Rome and was crowned Emperor.

Do call, cause to be called; **bushment**, ambush; **hoving**, hovering; to **let** them, to hinder them; **gat the field**, won the battle; **graith**, make ready; **Sessoine**, Soissons; **dyndle**, shake; **battles** armies; **appertyces**, feats; **admirals**, commanders, not necessarily by sea; **fordele**, **afterdele**, advantage, disadvantage; **Vicecount**, the district round Milan, where the famous family of the Visconti held sway.

THEN the King did do call Sir Gawaine, Sir Bors, Sir Lionel, and Sir Bedivere, and commanded them to go straight to Sir Lucius, and say ye to him that hastily he remove out of my land, and if he will not, bid him make him ready to battle, and not distress the poor people. Then anon these noble knights dressed them-

selves to horseback, and came to a greenwood, and they saw many pavilions set in a meadow, of silk of divers colours, beside a river, and the Emperor's pavilion was in the middle, with an eagle displayed above. To the which tent our knights rode toward, and ordained Sir Gawaine and Sir Bors to do the message, and left in a bushment Sir Lionel and Sir Bedivere. And then Sir Gawaine and Sir Bors did their message, and commanded Lucius in Arthur's name to avoid his land, or shortly to address him to battle. To whom Lucius answered and said, Ye shall return unto your lord and say ye to him that I shall subdue him and all his lands. Then Sir Gawaine was wroth, and said, I had liefer than all France fight against thee. Then a knight named Sir Sainas, nigh cousin to the Emperor, said, Lo, how these Britons be full of pride and boast, and they brag as though they bare up all the world. Then Sir Gawaine was sore grieved with these words, and pulled out his sword, and smote off his head; and therewith turned their horses and rode over waters and through woods till they came to their bushment, whereat Sir Lionel and Sir Bedivere were hovering. The Romans followed fast, on horseback and on foot, over a champaign unto a wood; and there was a recounter, for the bushment brake on the Romans, and slew and hew down the Romans, and forced them to flee, whom the noble knights chased unto their tents. Then the Romans gathered more people, and there was a new battle, and Sir Bors and Sir Berel were taken. But when Sir Gawaine saw that he took with him Sir Idrus, the good knight, and pulled out Galatine, his good sword, and smote him that he took Sir Bors and took Sir Bors from him, and Sir Idrus likewise rescued Sir Berel. Then began the battle to be great; that our knights were in great jeopardy, wherefore Sir Gawaine sent to King Arthur for succour, and that he hie him, for I am sore wounded. But anon Sir Gawaine and his fellows gat the field, and put the Romans to flight, and after returned and came with their fellowship in such wise that no man of worship was lost of them, save that

Gawaine was sore hurt. And on the morn the King sent all the prisoners into Paris under the guard of Sir Lancelot. Now turn we to the Emperor of Rome, which espied that these prisoners should be sent to Paris, and anon he sent to lie in a bushment certain knights and princes with sixty thousand men, for to rescue his knights and lords that were prisoners. And so on the morn as they should pass through a wood Sir Lancelot sent certain knights to espy if these were in the woods to let them. And anon they returned and told Sir Lancelot that there lay in wait for them three score thousand Romans. And then Sir Lancelot with such knights as he had, and men of war to the number of ten thousand, put them in array and met with them and fought with them manly, and slew many of the Romans. But Sir Lancelot fought so nobly that no man might endure a stroke of his hand, but where he came he showed his prowess and his might, for he slew right down on every side; and the Romans and Saracens fled from him as the sheep from the wolf or from the lion, and put them all that abode alive to flight. And so long they fought that tidings came to King Arthur, and anon he graithed him and came to the battle, and when he saw his knights, how they had vanquished the battle, he embraced them knight by knight in his arms, and said, Ye be worthy to wield all your honour and worship; there was never king save myself that had so noble knights. Now leave we King Arthur and speak we of Lucius, the Emperor, the which, when he heard how King Arthur's knights had won the field, anon he sent forth a king, which hight Sir Leomie, with a great army, and bade him hie him fast tofore, and he would follow hastily after. King Arthur was warned privily, and sent his people to Sessoine, and took up the towns and castles from the Romans. Then the King commanded Sir Cadur to take the rearward, and to take with him certain knights of the Round Table. So King Arthur disperpled his host in divers parties, to the end that his enemies should not escape. When

the Emperor was entered into the vale of Sessoine he might see where King Arthur was embattled and his banner displayed; and he was beset round about with his enemies, that needs he must fight or yield him, for he might not flee; and then he did command his trumpets to blow the bloody sounds, in such wise that the ground trembled and dyndled. Then the battles approached and strove and shouted on both sides, and great strokes were smitten on both sides, many men overthrown, hurt, and slain; and great valiances, prowesses, and appertyces of war were that day showed, which were over long to recount the noble feats of every man, for they should contain an whole volume. But in especial, King Arthur did as nobly with his hands as was possible a man to do; he drew out Excalibur his sword, and awaited ever whereas the Romans were thickest and most grieved the people, and anon he addressed him on that part, and hew and slew downright, and rescued his people; and he slew a great giant named Galapas, which was a man of an huge quantity and height; he shorted him and smote off both his legs by the knees, saying, Now art thou better of a size to deal with than thou wert, and after smote off his head. There Sir Gawaine fought nobly, and slew three admirals in that battle. And so did all the knights of the Round Table. Thus the battle was great, and oftsides that one party was at a fordele, and anon at an afterdele, which endured so long, till at the last King Arthur espied where Lucius the Emperor fought, and did wonder with his own hands; and anon he rode to him, and either smote other fiercely, and at last Lucius smote Arthur thwart the visage, and gave him a large wound. And when King Arthur felt himself hurt anon he smote him again with Excalibur that it cleft his head, from the summit, and stinted not till it came to his breast; and then the Emperor fell down dead, and there ended his life. And when it was known that the Emperor was slain, anon all the Romans with all their host, put them to flight, and King Arthur with all his knights followed the chase, and slew downright all them that

they might attain. And thus was the victory given to King Arthur, and the triumph, and there were slain on the part of Lucius more than an hundred thousand. And after King Arthur did do ransack the dead bodies and did do bury them that were slain of his retinue, every man according to his estate and degree that he was of. And them that were hurt he let the surgeons do search their hurts and wounds and commanded to spare no salves nor medicines till they were whole. And then the book telleth how King Arthur overcame the Saracens and took many cities and much land until at the last he came into the Vale of Vicecount among the vines, and from thence he sent unto the Senators to wit whether they would know him for their lord. But soon after that, on a Saturday, came unto King Arthur all the Senators that were left on live and the noblest Cardinals that then dwelt in Rome and prayed him of peace and besought him as Governor to give licence for six weeks for to assemble all the Romans and then to crown him Emperor with chrism, as it belongeth to so high estate. I assent, said the King, like as ye have devised, and at Christmas there to be crowned, and to hold my Round Table with my knights, as me liketh. And at the day appointed he came into Rome, and was crowned Emperor by the Pope's hand, with all the royalty that could be made, and sojourned there a time and established all his lands from Rome into France, and gave lands and realms unto his servants and knights, to every each after his desert, in such wise that none complained, rich nor poor.

CHAPTER V

*How Sir Meliagrance accused the Queen of treason,
and how Sir Lancelot fought for her and killed
Sir Meliagrance.*

Bedashed, decked; **overthwart**, across; **chariot**, cart; **wallop**, gallop; **brast**, burst; **appeach**, accuse; **it will be taken at your hands**, you will have to make it good in combat; **eftures**, chambers; **made no fare**, gave no sign; **nist**, ne wist, knew not; **cried upon**, cried to; **brent**, burned; **lessez les aler**, Laissez-les aller, let them go; **utterance**, utmost; **yolden**, yielded; **on high**, aloud; knights **parters**, knights whose duty it was to part the antagonists; **sithen**, next; **onside**, aside.

SOON after that King Arthur was come from Rome into England, then all the knights of the Table Round resorted unto the King, and made many jousts and tournaments; and some there were, that were but knights, which increased so in arms and worship that they passed all their fellows in prowess and noble deeds, and that was well proved on many; but in especial it was proved on Sir Lancelot du Lake, for in all tournaments and jousts and deeds of arms, both for life and death, he passed all other knights, and at no time he was never overcome, but if it were by treason or enchantment; therefore is he the first knight that the French book maketh mention of after King Arthur came from Rome; wherefore Queen Guenever had him in great favour above all other knights, and in certain he loved the Queen again above all other ladies and damosels of his life, and for her he did many deeds of arms, and saved her from the fire through his noble chivalry. So it befell in the month of May that Queen Guenever with ten knights and ten ladies rode on Maying in woods and meadows as it pleased them, in great joy and delight; but Sir Lancelot was not with them; and they all were bedashed with herbs, mosses, and flowers in the best manner and freshest. Right so came a knight that

hight Sir Meliagrance out of a wood with an eight score of men well harnessed, and bade the Queen and her knights abide, for maugre their heads they should abide. Then the ten knights of the Table Round drew their swords, and slew forty men of the best and boldest of them that were with Sir Meliagrance. So when the Queen saw her knights thus dolefully wounded and needs must be slain at the last, then for pity and sorrow she cried, Sir Meliagrance, slay not my noble knights, and I will go with thee upon this covenant, that thou save them, and suffer them to be no more hurt, with this, that they be led with me whithersoever thou ledest me. Then by the Queen's commandment they left battle, and dressed the wounded knights on horseback, some sitting, some overthwart their horses, that it was pity to behold them. Then the Queen privily called unto her a child of her chamber and said, Go thou when thou seest thy time and bear this ring unto Sir Lancelot du Lake and pray him that he will rescue me. So the child espied his time, and lightly he took his horse, and departed as fast as he might, and within a while he came to Westminster, and anon he found Sir Lancelot, and told his message. Then Sir Lancelot rode as fast as he might, and came to the same place whereas the ten knights fought with Sir Meliagrance; and so followed the track until that he came to a wood, and there were thirty archers, that bade him turn back or else to go on foot for that his horse should be slain. So then they shot Sir Lancelot's horse. Then Sir Lancelot avoided his horse; but there were so many ditches and hedges betwixt them and him that he might not meddle with none of them. Then by fortune there came by him a chariot that came thither for to fetch wood. Say me, carter, said Sir Lancelot, what shall I give thee to suffer me to leap into thy chariot, and that thou bring me unto a castle within this two mile? Thou shalt not go with me, said the carter. Then Sir Lancelot leapt to him and gave him such a buffet that he fell to the earth stark dead. Then the other carter, his fellow, was afear'd, and cried, Fair lord, save my life, and I shall

bring you where ye will. So the carter drove on a great wallop to the gates of the castle, and Sir Lancelot descended and cried, that all the castle rang of it, Where art thou, false traitor, Sir Meliagrance? now come forth here, thou traitor knight, for here I am, Lancelot du Lake, that shall fight with you. And therewithal he drave the gate wide open upon the porter, and smote him under his ear with his gauntlet, that his neck burst in sunder. When Sir Meliagrance heard that Sir Lancelot was there he ran unto Queen Guenever, and fell upon his knee, and said, Mercy, madam, now I put me wholly into your grace; and all this that is amiss on my part shall be amended right as yourself will devise. What would ye that I did? said the Queen. I would, said Meliagrance, that ye will rule Sir Lancelot; and such cheer as may be made him in this poor castle ye and he shall have until tomorn, and then may ye and all they return unto Westminster. Ye say well, said the Queen, and better is peace than ever war, and the less noise the more is my worship. So by her means were Sir Lancelot and Sir Meliagrance accorded. But Sir Meliagrance espied his time, and in the morning he appeached the Queen of treason, that he might hide his own treachery; and he said, I will prove with my hands that she is a foul traitress unto my lord Arthur. Beware what ye do, said Lancelot, for an ye say so, it will be taken at your hands. Then said Sir Meliagrance, Here is my glove, that she is traitress unto my lord, King Arthur. And I receive your glove, said Sir Lancelot. And so they were sealed with their signets, and delivered unto the ten knights. At what day shall we do battle together? said Sir Lancelot. This day eight days, said Sir Meliagrance, in the field beside Westminster. I am agreed, said Sir Lancelot. But I pray you, said Sir Meliagrance, await me with no treason nor none villainy, the meanwhile. So God me help, said Sir Lancelot, ye shall right well wit I was never of no such conditions. Then let us go to dinner, said Sir Meliagrance, and after dinner ye and the Queen and

ye all may ride to Westminster. I will well, said Sir Lancelot. Then Sir Meliagrance said to Sir Lancelot, Pleaseth it you to see the eftures of the castle? With a good will, said Sir Lancelot. And so they went together from chamber to chamber, for Sir Lancelot dread no perils. But as he went he trod on a trap, and the board rolled, and Sir Lancelot fell down more than ten fathoms into a cave full of straw; and Sir Meliagrance departed, and made no fare, as that he nist where he was. And when Sir Lancelot was missed, they marvelled where he was become, and then the Queen and many of them deemed that he was departed, as he was wont to do, suddenly. But Sir Lancelot lay in the prison seven days, and every day there came a lady and brought him his meat and his drink, and would fain have had his love; but on the eighth day she delivered him, and brought him to his armour, and gave him a horse, and so he rode as hard as he might. Now Queen Guenever was brought to a fire to be brent; for Sir Meliagrance ever cried upon King Arthur to do him justice, other else bring forth Sir Lancelot du Lake. Then was the King and all the court full sore abashed and shamed that the Queen should be brent in default of Sir Lancelot. And Sir Lavaine said, My lord, King Arthur, I beseech you give me license to do battle here this day, for to save my lady, the Queen. Now I give you leave, said King Arthur, and do your best. Then was Sir Lavaine armed and horsed, and suddenly at the lists' end he rode to perform this battle; and right as the heralds should cry, Lesses les aler, right so came in Sir Lancelot, driving with all the force of his horse. And anon Sir Lancelot and Sir Meliagrance dressed them unto battle and took their spears, and so they came together as thunder, and there Sir Lancelot bare him down quite over his horse's croup. And then Sir Lancelot alit and dressed his shield on his shoulder, with his sword in his hand, and Sir Meliagrance in the same wise dressed him unto him, and there they smote many great strokes together; and at the last Sir Lancelot smote him such a buffet

upon the helmet that he fell on the one side to the earth. And then he cried upon him aloud, Most noble knight, save my life, for I yield me unto you, and I require you, as ye be a knight and fellow of the Table Round, slay me not. Then Sir Lancelot wist not what to do, for he had had liefer than all the good of the world he might have been revenged upon Sir Meliagrance. And he looked up to the Queen Guenever; and the Queen wagged her head, as she would have him dead. Then Sir Lancelot bade him rise for shame, and perform that battle to the utterance. Nay, said Sir Meliagrance, I will never arise until ye take me as yolden and recreant. I shall unarm my head, said Sir Lancelot, and my left quarter of my body, and let bind my left hand behind me, and right so I shall do battle with you. Then Sir Meliagrance started up, and said on high, My Lord Arthur, take heed to this proffer, for I will take it. Then the knights parters of the field disarmed Sir Lancelot, first his head and sithen his left arm, and they bound his left arm behind his back. Then Sir Meliagrance came with his sword all on high, and Sir Lancelot showed him openly his bare head, and his bare left side; and when he weened to have smitten him upon the bare head, then lightly he avoided the left leg and the left side, and put his right hand and his sword to that stroke, and so put it on side with great sleight; and then with great force Sir Lancelot smote him on the helmet such a buffet that the stroke carved the head in two parts. Then there was no more to do, but he was drawn out of the field, and then the King and the Queen made more of Sir Lancelot du Lake, and more he was cherished, than ever he was aforehand.

CHAPTER VI

*How Sir Lancelot rescued the Queen from the fire,
and how Arthur made war on him.*

Long upon, along of ; **an if**, if (an or if is not wanted) ; **rash**, strike ; **other**, or ; **for-bled**, weak from loss of blood ; **shriven**, confessed ; **kirtle**, jacket ; **Joyous Gard**, Lancelot's Castle : said to have been at Berwick, or Alnwick, or Bamborough ; **sithen**, since ; **underne**, between 9 a.m. and noon ; **stour**, battle ; **hardy**, bold ; **ne**, nor ; **brym**, fierce ; **feutre**, lay in rest ; **feloniously**, ferociously ; **orgulous**, haughty.

IN May, when every lusty heart flourisheth and burgeoneth, it befell a great anger and mishap that stinted not till the flower of chivalry of all the world was destroyed and slain ; and all was long upon two unhappy knights, the which were named Agravaine and Mordred, that were brethren unto Sir Gawaine ; for they had ever a privy hate unto the Queen, Dame Guenever, and to Sir Lancelot, and daily and nightly they ever watched upon Sir Lancelot. So upon a time, when King Arthur had ridden from Carlisle on hunting, these knights took with them twelve knights of the Round Table, and hid themselves ; and the Queen and Sir Lancelot were set upon treason against King Arthur ; and the Queen sent word unto Sir Lancelot that he should speak with her ; so Sir Lancelot departed, and took his sword under his arm, and so in his mantle that noble knight put himself in great jeopardy. And thus as they were together there came Sir Agravaine and Sir Mordred, with the twelve knights, and said ; Traitor knight, now art thou taken. Alas, said Queen Guenever, now we are mischiefed both. Madam, said Sir Lancelot, is there here any armour ? an if there be any given to me I shall soon stint their malice. Truly, said the Queen, I have none armour, shield, sword, nor spear. Wherefore ye are likely to be slain, and then I shall be brent. I would, an it might please God, that they would take me and slay me, and suffer you to escape. That shall never

be, said Sir Lancelot; God defend me from such a shame. And therewith Sir Lancelot wrapped his mantle about his arm well and surely; and by then they had gotten a great form out of the hall, and therewithal they rashed at the door. Fair lords, said Sir Lancelot, leave your noise, and I shall set open this door, and then may ye do with me what it liketh you. Then Lancelot unbarred the door and held it open a little so that one man might come in at once; and so there came striding a good knight, and his name was Colgrevance of Gore, and he with a sword struck at Sir Lancelot mightily, and he put aside the stroke and gave him such a buffet upon the helmet that he fell grovelling dead within the chamber door; and Sir Lancelot with help of the Queen and her ladies was lightly armed in Sir Colgrevance's armour. So then Sir Lancelot set all open the chamber door, and mightily and knightly he strode in amongst them; and anon at his first buffet he slew Sir Agravaine, and twelve of his fellows within a little while after, he laid them cold to the earth, for there was none of the twelve that might stand Sir Lancelot one buffet. Also Sir Lancelot wounded Sir Mordred, and he fled with all his might. So Sir Lancelot went until his lodging, and took counsel of his kin and of his friends, how they might rescue the Queen. And they were all consented that for better other for worse, if so were that the Queen were on that morn brought to the fire, shortly they all would rescue her. And so they put them all in an embushment in a wood, as nigh Carlisle as they might, and there they abode still, to wit what the King would do.

Now when Sir Mordred was escaped from the noble knight, anon he gat his horse and rode unto King Arthur, sore wounded and smitten and all for-bled; and he told the King all, from the beginning to the ending. Alas, me sore repenteth, said the King, that ever Sir Lancelot should be against me. Now I am sure the noble fellowship of the Round Table is broken for ever, for with him will many a noble knight hold; and now it is fallen so, said the King, that I may

not with my worship but the Queen must suffer the death. So then there was made great ordinance in this heat that the Queen must be judged to the death; and the law was such in those days that whatsoever they were, of what estate or degree, if they were found guilty of treason, there should be none other remedy but death. So the Queen was led forth, and despoiled unto her smock, and her ghostly father was brought to her, to be shriven of her misdeeds. Then was there weeping and wailing and wringing of hands of many lords and ladies; and there was one that Sir Lancelot had sent unto that place for to spy what time the Queen should go unto her death; and anon as he saw the Queen, then he gave Sir Lancelot warning. Then was there but spurring and plucking up of horses, and right so they came to the fire; and who that stood against them, there were they slain; there might none withstand Sir Lancelot. Then when Sir Lancelot had slain and put to flight all that would withstand him, then he rode straight unto Dame Guenever, and made a kirtle and a gown to be cast upon her, and prayed her to be of good cheer. Wit you well the Queen was glad that she was escaped from the death. And so he rode his way with the Queen unto Joyous Gard.

So then the King sent letters and writs throughout all England, both in the length and the breadth, for to summon all his knights; and so unto Arthur drew many knights, dukes, and earls, so that he had a great host, and then the King and all his host made them ready to lay siege about Sir Lancelot, where he lay within Joyous Gard. Thereof heard Sir Lancelot, and purveyed him of many good knights. Thus they were on both parties well furnished and garnished of all manner of thing that longed to the war. But King Arthur's host was so big that Sir Lancelot would not abide him in the field, but drew him to his strong castle with all manner of victual and as many noble men as he might suffice within the town and the castle. Then came King Arthur and laid a siege all about Joyous Gard, both at the town and at the castle;

but in no wise Sir Lancelot would ride out, neither he would none of his good knights to issue out, until fifteen weeks were past. But at the last the kinsmen of Sir Lancelot said unto him, My lord, Sir Lancelot, we charge you, as ye will have our service, keep us no longer within these walls, for wit you well plainly, we will ride into the field and do battle with them. Alas, said Sir Lancelot, for to ride out of this castle and to do battle I am full loth. Then spake Sir Lancelot on high unto King Arthur, My lord, I beseech you, sithen I am thus required and conjured to ride into the field, that ye come not into the battle. And then either party made them ready on the morn for to do battle, and great purveyance was made on both sides. And at underne Sir Arthur was ready in the field with three great hosts; and then Sir Lancelot's fellowship came out at three gates, in a full good array, and Sir Lionel in the foremost battle, and Sir Lancelot came in the middle, and Sir Bors came out at the third gate. Thus they came in order and rule, as full noble knights; and always Sir Lancelot charged all his knights in any wise to save King Arthur and Sir Gawaine.

Then came forth Sir Gawaine from the King's host and proffered to joust; and Sir Lionel was a fierce knight, and lightly he encountered with Sir Gawaine; and there Sir Gawaine smote Sir Lionel throughout the body, that he dashed to the earth like as he had been dead; and Sir Ector de Maris and other more bare him into the castle. Then there began a great stour, and much people was slain. And ever King Arthur was nigh about Sir Lancelot to have slain him, and Sir Lancelot suffered him, and would not strike him. So Sir Bors encountered with King Arthur, and there with a spear Sir Bors smote him down, and so he alit and drew his sword, and said to Sir Lancelot, Shall I make an end of this war? and meant to have slain King Arthur. Not so hardy, said Sir Lancelot, upon pain of thy head that thou touch him no more, for I will never see that most noble King, that made me knight, neither slain ne shamed. And therewithal

Sir Lancelot alit off his horse and took up the King; and horsed him again, and said thus, My Lord Arthur, for God's love stint this strife, for ye get here no worship an I would do mine utterance, but always I forbear you, and ye nor none of yours forbeareth me. Then when King Arthur was on horseback he looked upon Sir Lancelot, and then the tears brast out of his eyen, thinking on the great courtesy that was in Sir Lancelot more than in any other man; and therewith the King rode his way, and might no longer behold him, and said, Alas that ever this war begun. And then either party of the battles withdrew them to repose them, and buried the dead, and to the wounded men they laid soft salves; and thus they endured that night till the morn. And on the morn by underne they made them ready to do battle. And then Sir Bors led the forward; and there came Sir Gawaine, as brym as any boar, with a great spear in his hand; and when Sir Bors saw him he thought to avenge his brother Sir Lionel of the despite that Sir Gawaine did him. And so they feutred their spears, and with all their might of their horses and themselves they met together so feloniously that either bare other through, and so they fell both to the earth; and then the battle joined, and there was much slaughter on both parties. Then Sir Lancelot rescued Sir Bors, and sent him into the castle; but neither Sir Gawaine nor Sir Bors died not of their wounds, for they were all holpen. So then Sir Lancelot strained himself more than he did aforehand, and by cause his nephew Sir Bors was sore wounded; and by evensong-time Sir Lancelot and his party better stood, for their horses went in blood past the fetlocks, there was so much people slain. And then for pity Sir Lancelot withheld his knights, and suffered King Arthur's party for to withdraw them on side. And then Sir Lancelot's party withdrew them into his castle, and either party buried their dead, and put salve unto the wounded men. So when Sir Gawaine was hurt, they on King Arthur's party were not so orgulous as they were toforehand to do battle.

CHAPTER VII

*How Sir Lancelot brought the Queen to Arthur ;
and was banished.*

Nist, wist not, knew not ; **with this**, provided that ; **worshipped**, honoured ; **avaunt**, boast ; to **record**, to witness ; **worship**, worth-ship, honour ; **dolorous**, sorrowful ; **harness**, armour ; **gar make**, cause to be made ; **nis**, ne is, is not ; **middes**, midst ; **pike**, pick, steal away.

OF this war was noised through all Christendom, and at the last it was noised afore the Pope ; and he, considering the great goodness of King Arthur, and of Sir Lancelot, that was called the most noblest knight of the world, wherefore the Pope called unto him a noble clerk, that at that time was there present, (the French book saith it was the Bishop of Rochester) and the Pope gave him bulls under lead unto King Arthur of England, charging him, upon pain of interdicting all England, that he take his Queen, Dame Guenever, unto him again, and accord with Sir Lancelot. So when the Bishop was come unto Carlisle he showed the King these bulls. And when the King understood these bulls he nist what to do ; full fain he would have been accorded with Sir Lancelot, but Sir Gawaine would not suffer him, because that Sir Lancelot had slain his brethren Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris, by misadventure, whenas he rescued the Queen from the fire ; for they were unarmed, and he slew them in the press, not knowing them ; but Sir Gawaine ever sought to slay Sir Lancelot, and would not that the King should accord with him, but as for the Queen he assented. And then the bishop had of the King his great seal and his assurance, as he was a true anointed king that Sir Lancelot should come safe and go safe, and that the Queen should not be spoken unto of the King, nor of none other, for no thing done afore time. So when the bishop was come to Joyous Gard there he showed Sir Lancelot how the Pope had written unto Arthur and unto him,

and there he told him the perils if he withheld the Queen from the King. It was never in my thought, said Sir Lancelot, to withhold the Queen from my Lord Arthur; but insomuch as she should have been dead for my sake, meseemeth it was my part to save her life and to put her from that danger, till better recover might come. And now I will be a thousand-fold more gladder to bring her again than ever I was of her taking away; with this, I may be sure to come safe and to go safe, and that the Queen shall have her liberty as she had before, and never for nothing that hath been surmised afore this time she never from this day stand in no peril. Then the bishop showed Sir Lancelot all his writing, both from the Pope and from King Arthur. This is sure enough, said Sir Lancelot, for full well I dare trust my lord's own writing and his seal, for he was never shamed of his promise. Therefore ye shall ride unto the King afore, and recommend me unto his good grace, and let him have knowledging that this same day eight days I myself shall bring my lady, Queen Guenever, unto him. Then Sir Lancelot purveyed him an hundred knights, and every knight held a branch of olive in his hand on tokening of peace; and the Queen had four and twenty gentlewomen following her in the same wise. And so they rode from Joyous Gard to Carlisle, and came to the castle, that all men might behold; and wit you well there was many a weeping eye. And then Sir Lancelot himself alit and avoided his horse, and took the Queen, and so led her where King Arthur was in his seat, and said, My most redoubted King, ye shall understand, by the Pope's commandment and yours I have brought to you my lady the Queen, as right requireth; and if there be any knight, of whatsoever degree that he be, except your person, that will say but she is true to you, I here myself will make it good upon his body that she is true lady unto you; but liars ye have listened, and that hath caused debate betwixt you and me. Well, well, Sir Lancelot, said the King, I have given thee no cause to do to me as thou hast done, for I have

worshipped thee and thine more than any of all my knights. My good lord, said Sir Lancelot, so ye be not displeased, ye shall understand that I and mine have done you oft better service than any other knights have done; and when ye have been full hard bestad divers times I have myself rescued you from many dangers. For now I will make avaunt, said Sir Lancelot; I will that ye all wit that I found never no manner of knight but that I was overhard for him, an I had done my utterance, thanked be God. And I take God to record, I never was wroth nor greatly heavy with no good knight, an I saw him busy about to win worship; and glad I was ever when I found any knight that might endure me on horseback and on foot; howbeit Sir Carados of the Dolorous Tower was a full noble knight and a passing strong man, and that wot ye, my lord Sir Gawaine; for by fine force he pulled you out of your saddle, and bound you overthwart afore him to his saddle-bow; and there, my lord Sir Gawaine, I rescued you, and slew him afore your sight. Also I found his brother Sir Turguin, in like wise leading Sir Gaheris, your brother, bounden afore him, and there I rescued your brother and slew that Turguin. And therefore, said Sir Lancelot unto Sir Gawaine, meseemeth ye ought of right to remember this; for an I might have your good will I would trust to God to have my lord Arthur's good grace. The King may do as he will, said Sir Gawaine, but wit thou well, Sir Lancelot, thou and I shall never be accorded while we live, for thou has slain three of my brethren; and two of them ye slew traitorly and piteously for they bare none harness against thee nor none would bear. As Jesus be my help, said Sir Lancelot, I slew never Sir Gareth nor Sir Gaheris by my will. But thus much I shall offer me, if it may please the King's good grace, and you, my lord, Sir Gawaine; I shall first begin at Sandwich, and then I shall go in my shirt barefoot; and at every ten miles' end I will found and gar make an house of religion, of what order that ye will assign to me, with an whole convent, to sing

and read, day and night, in especial for Sir Gareth's sake, and Sir Gaheris'. And this shall I perform from Sandwich unto Carlisle, and every house shall have sufficient livelihood. Sir Lancelot, said Sir Gawaine, I have right well heard thy speech and thy great proffers, but wit thou well I will never forgive my brothers' death; and if mine uncle, King Arthur will accord with thee, he shall lose my service, for thou art both false to the King and to me. Sir, said Lancelot, he beareth not the life that may make that good; and if ye will charge me with so high a thing ye must pardon me, for then needs must I answer you. Nay, said Sir Gawaine, we are past that at this time, and that caused the Pope, for he hath charged the King that he shall take his Queen again, and to accord with thee, Sir Lancelot, as for this season, and therefore thou shalt go safe as thou camest. But in this land thou shalt not abide past fifteen days; so the King and we were consented and accorded ere thou camest. Then Sir Lancelot sighed, and therewith the tears fell on his cheeks, and then he said thus, Alas, most noble Christian realm, whom I have loved above all other realms, and in thee I have gotten a great part of my worship, and now I shall depart in this wise. Truly me repenteth that ever I came in this realm that should be thus shamefully banished, undeserved and causeless; but fortune is so variant and the wheel so moveable there nis none constant abiding. And if ye, most redoubted King, will come upon my lands to war upon me, I must endure you as well as I may. But as to you, Sir Gawaine, if that ye come there, I pray you charge me not with treason nor felony, for, an ye do, I must answer you. Do thou thy best, said Sir Gawaine, therefore hie thee fast that thou wert gone, and wit thou well we shall soon come after, and break the strongest castle that thou hast upon thine head. That shall not need, said Sir Lancelot, for an I were as orgulous set as ye are, wit you well I should meet you in the middes of the field. Make thou no more language, said Sir Gawaine, but deliver the Queen from thee, and pike

thee lightly out of this court. Then Sir Lancelot said unto Guenever, in hearing of the King and of them all, Madam, now I must depart from you and this noble fellowship for ever; and sithen it is so I beseech you to pray for me, and say me well; and if ye be hard bestad by any false tongues, lightly, my lady, send me word, and if any knight's hands may deliver you by battle, I shall deliver you. And therewith he brought the Queen unto the King, and then took his leave and departed. And when the noble Sir Lancelot took his horse to ride out of Carlisle, there was sobbing and weeping for pure dole of his departing, and so he took his way unto Joyous Gard; and then ever after he called it the Dolorous Gard. And thus departed Sir Lancelot from the court for ever.

CHAPTER VIII

*Of the war between Lancelot and Arthur, and how
Lancelot twice overthrew Gawaine.*

Flemed, put to flight; **truss**, pack; **as that night**, for that night; every **deal**, every bit; **sue upon**, pursue, persecute; **appeal**, accuse; **till a bay**, to bay; **trace**, parry; **traverse**, parry by a cross-stroke; **kept** his might and his **braid**, maintained his strength and activity; **leech-craft**, medical skill; **deliverly**, nimbly; **foin**, thrust.

AND when Sir Lancelot came unto Joyous Gard he called his fellowship unto him and asked what they would do. Then they answered all wholly together with one voice, they would as he would do. My fair fellows, said Sir Lancelot, I must depart out of this most noble realm, and it grieveth me sore, for I shall depart with no worship, for a flemed man departeth never out of a realm with no worship, and that is my heaviness, for ever I fear after my days that men shall chronicle upon me that I was flemed out of this land. Then spake many noble knights, and said, Sir, an ye be so disposed to abide in this land we will never fail you; and if ye list not to abide

in this land there nis none of the good knights that here be will fail you. So they were accorded to go with Sir Lancelot; and to make short tale they trussed, and paid all that would ask them; and wholly an hundred knights departed with Sir Lancelot at once, and made their avows they would never leave him, for weal nor for woe. And so they shipped at Cardiff, and sailed unto Benwick; some men call it Bayonne, and some men call it Beaune, where the wine of Beaune is made. But to say the sooth Sir Lancelot and his nephews were lords of all France, and of all the lands that longed unto France. And then Sir Lancelot stuffed and furnished and garnished all his noble castles, and rewarded his noble knights. So leave we Sir Lancelot in his lands, and his noble knights with him, and return we again unto King Arthur and to Sir Gawaine, that made a great host ready, to the number of threescore thousand; and all thing was made ready, for their shipping to pass over sea; and so they shipped at Cardiff. And there Sir Arthur made Sir Mordred chief ruler of all England, and also he put Queen Guenever under his governance; and so the King passed the sea, and landed upon Sir Lancelot's lands, and these he brent and wasted, through the vengeance of Sir Gawaine, all that they might overrun. So Sir Lancelot sent forth a damosel and a dwarf with her, requiring King Arthur to leave his warring upon his lands, and so she start on a palfrey, and the dwarf ran by her side. And when she came to the pavilion of King Arthur, there she alit, and there met her a gentle knight, Sir Lucan the Butler, and led her unto the King, where he sat with Sir Gawaine, for to hear what she would say. So when she had told her tale, the water ran out of the King's eyes, and all the lords were full glad to advise the King as to be accorded with Sir Lancelot, save all only Sir Gawaine; and he said, My lord, what will ye do? Will ye now turn again, now ye are passed thus far upon this journey? All the world will speak of your villainy. Nay, said Sir Arthur, wit thou well, Sir Gawaine, I will do as ye will advise

me; and yet meseemeth his fair proffers were not good to be refused; but sithen I am come so far upon this journey I will that ye give the damosel her answer, for I may not speak to her for pity. Then Sir Gawaine said to the damosel thus; Damosel, say ye to Sir Lancelot that it is waste labour now to sue to mine uncle, for now it is too late; and say that I, Sir Gawaine, so send him word that I promise him, by the faith I owe unto God and to Knighthood, I shall never leave him till he hath slain me or I him. So the damosel departed and came unto Sir Lancelot; and when he had heard this answer, then the tears ran down by his cheeks. And then his noble knights strode about him and said, Sir Lancelot, wherefore make ye such cheer? Think what ye are, and what men we are, and let us match them in middes of the field. That may be lightly done, said Sir Lancelot, but I was never so loth to do battle; and therefore I pray you, fair sirs, as ye love me, be ruled as I will have you, for I will always flee that noble King that made me knight. Then they held their language, and as that night they took their rest. And upon the morn early, in the dawning of the day, as knights looked out, they saw the city of Benwick besieged round about, and fast they began to set up ladders; and then they defied them out of the town, and beat them from the walls mightily. Then came forth Sir Gawaine, well armed, upon a stiff steed, and he came before the chief gate, crying, Sir Lancelot, where art thou? Is there none of you proud knights that dare break a spear with me? Then Sir Bors made him ready, and came forth out of the town, and at that time Sir Gawaine encountered Sir Bors, and smote him from his horse, and almost he had slain him; and so Sir Bors was rescued and borne into the town. Then came forth Sir Lionel, brother unto Sir Bors, and thought to revenge him; and either feutred their spears and ran together, but Sir Gawaine had such grace that he smote Sir Lionel down and wounded him there passing sore; and then Sir Lionel was rescued and borne into the town. And thus Sir

Gawaine came every day, and he failed not but that he smote down one knight or other. So thus they endured half a year, and much slaughter was of people on both parties. Then it befell upon a day Sir Gawaine came before the gates, armed at all pieces, on a hoble horse, with a great spear in his hand, and thus he cried, with a loud voice; Where art thou now, thou false traitor, Sir Lancelot? Why hidest thou thyself within holes and walls, like a coward? All this language heard Sir Lancelot, every deal; and his kin and his knights drew about him, and said, Sir Lancelot, now must ye defend you like a knight, or else ye be shamed for ever. So God me help, said Sir Lancelot, I am right heavy of Sir Gawaine's words; and I wot it as well as ye, that I must defend me, or else to be recreant. Then Sir Lancelot bade saddle his strongest horse, and let fetch his arms; and then spake on high unto King Arthur, and said, My lord Arthur, I am right heavy that ye thus sue upon me, for always I forbear you, and now have I forborne you half a year and suffered you to do what ye would do; and now may I endure it no longer, for now must I needs defend myself, insomuch Sir Gawaine hath appealed me of treason; the which is greatly against my will that ever I should fight against any of your blood, but now I am driven thereto as a beast till a bay. Then Sir Gawaine said, Sir Lancelot, an thou durst, do battle and let us ease our hearts. Then Sir Lancelot armed him lightly and mounted upon his horse, and the host without stood all apart, and the noble knights came out of the city by a great number; and when Arthur saw the number of men and knights he marvelled, and said to himself, Alas that ever Sir Lancelot was against me, for now I see he hath forborne me. And so the covenant was made that no man should nigh them nor deal with them, till the one were dead or yolden. ✓ Then Sir Gawaine and Sir Lancelot departed a great way in sunder, and then they came together with all their horses' might as they might run; and either smote other in middes of their shields; but the knights were

so strong and their spears so big that their horses might not endure their buffets, and so their horses fell to the earth. Then they stood together and gave many sad strokes on divers places of their bodies that the blood brast out on many sides. Then had Sir Gawaine such a grace and gift that an holy man had given him, that every day in the year, from underne till high noon, his might increased those three hours as much as thrice his strength, and that caused Sir Gawaine to win great honour. Thus Sir Lancelot fought with Sir Gawaine; and when Sir Lancelot felt his might evermore increase he wondered, and dread him sore to be shamed, wherefore Sir Lancelot traced and traversed and covered himself with his shield, and kept his might and his braid during three hours; and that while Sir Gawaine gave him many sad brunts, that all the knights that beheld them marvelled. And when it was past noon Sir Gawaine had no more but his own might. Then Sir Lancelot doubled his strokes and gave Sir Gawaine such a buffet on the helmet that he fell down on his side, and Sir Lancelot withdrew him from him. Why withdrawest thou thee? said Sir Gawaine; now turn again, false traitor knight, and slay me, for an thou leave me thus, when I am whole I shall do battle with thee again. I shall endure you, Sir, by God's grace, but wit thou well, Sir Gawaine, I will never smite a felled knight. And so Sir Lancelot went into the city; and Sir Gawaine was borne into King Arthur's pavilion, and salved with soft ointments. Thus Sir Gawaine lay sick three weeks in his tent with all manner of leech craft that might be had. And as soon as Gawaine might go and ride he armed him at all points, and came riding afore the chief gate of Benwick, and there he cried on height, Where art thou, Sir Lancelot? Come forth, thou false traitor knight and recreant, for I am here, Sir Gawaine, will prove this that I say upon thee. All this Sir Lancelot heard, and said, Sir Gawaine, me repents of your foul saying; for I know your might and all that ye may do; and well ye wot, Sir Gawaine, ye may not greatly hurt me. Come down, traitor knight,

said he, and make it good the contrary with thy hands, for it mishapped me the last battle to be hurt of thy hands; therefore wit thou well I am come this day to make amends, for I ween this day to lay thee as low as thou laidest me. Jesus defend me, said Sir Lancelot, that ever I be so far in your danger as ye have been in mine, for then my days were done. And then Sir Lancelot armed him at all points, and mounted upon his horse, and gat a great spear in his hand, and rode out at the gate; and both the hosts were assembled, to see and behold the battle of these two noble knights. And then they laid their spears in their rests, and came together as thunder, and Sir Gawaine break his spear upon Sir Lancelot in a hundred pieces unto his hand; and Sir Lancelot smote him with a greater might, that Sir Gawaine's horse's feet raised, and so the horse and he fell to the earth. Then Sir Gawaine deliverly avoided his horse, and put his shield before him, and eagerly drew his sword, and Sir Lancelot likewise; and so stood they together and gave many sad strokes, that all men on both parties had thereof passing great wonder. But when Sir Lancelot felt Sir Gawaine's might so marvellously increase, he withheld his courage and his wind, and kept himself under covert of his might; and Sir Gawaine enforced himself with all his might and power to destroy Sir Lancelot; for ever as Sir Gawaine's might increased, right so increased his wind and his evil will. Thus Sir Gawaine did great pain unto Sir Lancelot three hours, that he had right great pain for to defend him. And when the three hours were passed, that Sir Lancelot felt that Sir Gawaine was come to his own proper strength, then Sir Lancelot doubled his strokes; and Sir Gawaine defended him mightily, but nevertheless Sir Lancelot smote such a stroke upon Sir Gawaine's helm that Sir Gawaine sank down upon his side in a swound; and anon, as he did awake, he waved and foined at Sir Lancelot as he lay, and said, Traitor knight, wit thou well I am not yet slain; come thou near me and perform this battle unto the uttermost. I will

do no more than I have done, said Sir Lancelot, for to smite a wounded man that may not stand, God defend me from such a shame. And then he turned him and went his way toward the city. And Sir Gawaine evermore called him traitor knight, and said, Wit thou well Sir Lancelot, when I am whole I shall do battle with thee again, for I shall never leave thee till that one of us be slain. Thus this siege endured, and Sir Gawaine lay sick near a month, and when he was well recovered, and ready within three days to do battle again with Sir Lancelot, right so came tidings unto Arthur from England that made King Arthur and all his host to remove.

CHAPTER IX

How Sir Mordred would have wedded Queen Guenever, and of the battle between Arthur and Mordred.

Carrack, ship ; **let him to land**, prevent him from landing ; **Barham Down**, near Canterbury ; **chafet**, platform ; **beame**, a kind of trumpet ; **put him in devoir**, attended to his duty ; **wood**, wildly ; **tide**, betide ; **bur**, a ring, to increase the grip of the hand ; **do me to wit**, let me know ; **yede**, went ; **piller**, pillager.

As Sir Mordred was ruler of all England he did do make letters, as though that they came from beyond the sea, saying that King Arthur was slain in battle with Sir Lancelot. Wherefore Sir Mordred made a Parliament, and called the lords together, and there he made them to choose him King, and so was he crowned at Canterbury ; and afterwards he drew him unto Winchester, and there he took the Queen Guenever and said plainly that he would wed her which was his uncle's wife. And so he made ready for the feast, and a day prefixed that they should be wedded, whereof Queen Guenever was passing heavy ; but she durst not discover her heart, but spake fair and agreed to Sir Mordred's will. Then she desired of Sir Mordred for to go to London, to buy all manner of things

that longed unto her wedding, and Sir Mordred gave her leave. And so when she came to London she took the Tower of London and suddenly in all haste possible she stuffed it with all manner of victual, and well garnished it with men, and so kept it. Then Sir Mordred was passing wroth out of measure, and laid a mighty siege about the Tower of London and made many great assaults thereat, and threw many great engines unto them, and shot great guns, but all might not avail. Then came the Bishop of Canterbury, the which was a noble clerk and an holy man, and thus he said to Sir Mordred; Sir, what will ye do? Will ye first displease God and sithen shame yourself and all knighthood? Is not King Arthur your uncle, no farther but your mother's brother? Sir, said the noble clerk, leave this opinion, or I shall curse you with book and bell and candle. Do thou thy worst, said Sir Mordred; wit thou well I shall defy thee. Sir, said the Bishop, and wit you well I shall not fear me to do that me ought to do. Peace, thou false priest, said Sir Mordred, for an thou chafe me any more I shall make strike off thy head. So the bishop departed, and did the curse in the most orgulous wise that might be done. And then Sir Mordred sought the Bishop of Canterbury, for to have slain him. Then the bishop fled and took part of his goods with him, and went nigh unto Glastonbury; and there he was as priest hermit in a chapel, and lived in poverty and in holy prayers, for well he understood that mischievous war was at hand. Then came word to Sir Mordred that King Arthur had araised the siege for Sir Lancelot, and he was coming homeward with a great host, to be avenged on Sir Mordred; wherefore Sir Mordred made write writs to all the barons of this land, and much people drew to him. And so Sir Mordred drew with a great host to Dover; and there came King Arthur with a great navy of ships and galleys and carracks. And there was Sir Mordred ready waiting upon his landing. But King Arthur was so courageous that there might no manner of knights let him to land, and his knights fiercely followed him, and so they

landed maugre Sir Mordred and his power, and put Sir Mordred back, that he fled and all his people. So when this battle was done King Arthur let bury his people that were dead. And then was noble Sir Gawaine found in a great boat, lying more than half dead. And there the King made sorrow out of measure, and took Sir Gawaine in his arms, and thrice he there swooned. And at the hour of noon Sir Gawaine yielded up the spirit, and then the King let inter him in a chapel within Dover Castle. Then was it told the King that Sir Mordred had pight a new field upon Barham Down; and upon the morn the King rode thither to him, and there was a great battle betwixt them, and much people was slain on both parties; but at the last Sir Arthur's party stood best, and Sir Mordred and his party fled unto Canterbury. Then King Arthur drew him with his host down by the seaside, westward, towards Salisbury; and there was a day assigned betwixt King Arthur and Sir Mordred, that they should meet upon a down beside Salisbury, and not far from the seaside; and this day was assigned on a Monday after Trinity Sunday, whereof King Arthur was passing glad, that he might be avenged upon Sir Mordred. So upon Trinity Sunday at night King Arthur dreamed a wonderful dream; him seemed he sat upon a chaflet in a chair, and the chair was fast to a wheel, and thereupon sat King Arthur in the richest cloth of gold that might be made; and there was under him an hideous deep, black water, and therein were all manner of serpents and worms and wild beasts, foul and horrible; and suddenly the wheel turned up-so-down, and he fell among the serpents, and every beast took him by a limb, and then the King cried as he lay in his bed and slept, Help. And then knights, squires, and yeomen waked the King; and then he fell on slumbering again, not sleeping nor thoroughly waking. So the King seemed verily that there came Sir Gawaine with a number of fair ladies with him. And when King Arthur saw him, then he said, O fair nephew, what be these ladies that hither be come with you? Sir, said Gawaine, all these be ladies for whom I have

foughten, when I was man living, in rightwise quarrel; and God hath given them that grace at their great prayer, by cause I did battle for them, that they should bring me hither unto you; thus much hath God given me leave, for to warn you of your death; for an ye fight tomorn with Sir Mordred doubt not ye must be slain, and the most part of your people on both parties. And for the great grace and goodness that Almighty Jesus hath unto you, God hath sent me to you of His special grace, to give you warning that in no wise ye do battle, as tomorn, but that ye take a treaty for a month day. For within a month shall come Sir Lancelot, and rescue you worshipfully, and slay Sir Mordred, and all that ever will hold with him. Then Sir Gawaine and all the ladies vanished. And anon the King commanded Sir Lucan, the Butler, and his brother Sir Bedivere, and two bishops with them, and charged them in any wise, an they might, to take a treaty for a month day with Sir Mordred. So they departed and came to Sir Mordred, and entreated him long time; and at the last Sir Mordred was agreed for to have Cornwall and Kent, by Arthur's days, and all England after the days of King Arthur.

Then were they condescended that King Arthur and Sir Mordred should meet betwixt both their hosts, and every each of them should bring fourteen persons; and they came with this word unto Arthur; and he went into the field. And when Arthur should depart he warned all his host that an they see any sword drawn look ye come on fiercely, and slay that traitor, Sir Mordred, for I in no wise trust him. In like wise Sir Mordred warned his host that an ye see any sword drawn, look that ye come on fiercely, and so slay all that ever before you standeth, for in no wise I will not trust for this treaty. And so they met and were agreed and accorded thoroughly; and wine was fetched, and they drank. Right soon came an adder out of a little heath bush, and it stung a knight on the foot. And when the knight felt him stung he looked down and saw the adder, and then he drew his sword, to slay the adder, and thought of none other harm. And

when the hosts on both sides saw that sword drawn, then they blew beames, trumpets, and horns, and shouted grimly. And so both hosts dressed them together. And never was there seen a more dolefuller battle in no Christian land, for there was but rushing and riding, foining and striking, and many a grim word was there spoken, either to other, and many a deadly stroke. But ever King Arthur rode throughout the battle of Sir Mordred many times, and did full nobly, as a noble king should, and at all times he fainted never; and Sir Mordred that day put him in devoir and in great peril. And thus they fought all the day long, and never stinted till the noble knights were laid in the cold earth, and ever they fought still, till it was near night, and by that time was there an hundred thousand laid dead upon the down. Then was Arthur wood wroth out of measure, when he saw his people'so slain from him. Then the King looked about him, and then was he ware of all his hosts and of all his good knights were left no more on live but two knights; that one was Sir Lucan the Butler, and his brother Sir Bedivere, and they were full sore wounded. Jesu mercy, said the King, where are all my noble knights become? Alas that ever I should see this doleful day; for now, said Arthur, I am come to mine end. But would to God that I wist where were that traitor Sir Mordred, that hath caused all this mischief. Then was King Arthur ware where Sir Mordred leaned upon his sword among a great heap of dead men. Now give me my spear, said Arthur unto Sir Lucan, for yonder I have espied the traitor that all this woe hath wrought. Sir, let him be, said Sir Lucan, for he is unhappy; and if ye pass this unhappy day ye shall be right well revenged upon him. Good lord, remember ye of your night's dream, and what the spirit of Sir Gawaine told you this night; yet God of His great goodness hath preserved you hitherto. Therefore for God's sake, my lord, leave off by this, for blessed be God ye have won the field, for here we be three on live and with Sir Mordred is none on live; and, if ye leave off now,

this wicked day of destiny is past. Tide me death, tide me life, said the King, now I see him yonder alone he shall never escape mine hands, for at a better avail shall I never have him. God speed you well, said Sir Bedivere. Then the King gat his spear in 'both his hands, and ran towards Sir Mordred, crying, Traitor, now is thy death-day come. And when Sir Mordred heard King Arthur, he ran until him with his sword drawn in his hand. And there King Arthur smote Sir Mordred under the shield with a foin of his spear throughout the body, more than a fathom. And when Sir Mordred felt that he had his death wound he thrust himself with all the might that he had up to the bur of King Arthur's spear. And right so he smote Arthur, with his sword holden in both his hands, on the side of the head, that the sword pierced the helmet and the brain-pan; and therewithal Sir Mordred fell stark dead to the earth, and the noble Arthur fell in a swoond to the earth; and there he swooned oftentimes, and Sir Lucan the Butler and Sir Bedivere oftentimes heave him up; and so, weakly, they led him betwixt them both to a little chapel not far from the seaside; and when the King was there he thought him well eased. Then heard they people cry in the field. Now go thou, Sir Lucan, said the King, and do me to wit what betokens that noise in the field. So Sir Lucan departed; howbeit he was grievously wounded in many places. And so, as he yede, he saw and hearkened by the . . . how that pillers and robbers were come into the field to pill and to rob; and who that were not dead all out there they slew them for their harness and their riches. When Sir Lucan understood this work, he came to the King and told him what he had heard and seen. Therefore, by my rede, said Sir Lucan, it is best that we bring you to some town. I would it were so, said the King; but I may not stand, mine head works so.

CHAPTER X

Of the death of King Arthur, Queen Guenever, and Sir Lancelot.

Eft, after; **wap**, lap; **wan**, grey; **Avillon**, Avelon, Glastonbury, once an island; **took the forest**, took to the forest; **holt**, wood; **graven**, digged; **deeming**, guessing; **besant**, a gold coin (the name is from Byzantium); **shall win the holy cross**. The Scots after Flodden had a legend that James IV. was not dead, but had gone to the Holy Land; **Hic jacet**, etc., "Here lies Arthur, king of old, and king to be"; **assoil**, absolve; **advision**, vision; **Amesbury**, in Wiltshire, near Salisbury; **orison**, prayer; **cered**, waxed; **Raines**, Rennes in Brittany; **web of lead**, a sheet of lead; **careful**, sorrowful; **dwine**, dwindle; **steven**, voice; was **houselled**, received the Communion; **aneale**, anoint with holy oil; **dretch**, trouble; **sweven**, dream; **on loft**, above ground.

THEN Sir Lucan took up the King the one part, and Sir Bedivere the other part, and in the lifting the King swooned; and Sir Lucan fell in a swoon with the lift, and therewith the noble knight's heart brast. And when the King awoke he beheld Sir Lucan, how he lay foaming at the mouth. Alas, said the King, this is to me a full heavy sight to see this noble duke so die for my sake, that had more need of help than I. Alas, he would not complain him; his heart was so set to help me; now Jesu have mercy upon his soul. Then Sir Bedivere wept for the death of his brother. Leave this mourning and weeping, said the King; for all this will not avail me, for my time hieth fast. Therefore take thou Excalibur, my good sword, and go with it to yonder water-side, and when thou comest there I charge thee throw my sword into that water, and come again and tell me what thou there seest. My lord, said Sir Bedivere, your commandment shall be done, and lightly bring you word again. So Sir Bedivere departed; and by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and the haft were all of precious stones; and then he said to himself, If I throw this rich sword in the water thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss. And he hid

Excalibur under a tree, and so, as soon as he might, he came again unto the King, and said he had been at the water and had thrown the sword in the water. What sawest thou there, said the King? Sir, he said, I saw nothing but waves and winds. That is untrue, said of thee, said the King; therefore go thou lightly again and do my commandment; as thou art lief and dear, spare not but throw it in. Then Sir Bedivere returned again and took the sword in his hand; and then him thought sin and shame to throw away that noble sword, and so eft he hid the sword, and returned again and told to the King that he had done his commandment. What sawest thou there, said the King? Sir, he said, I saw nothing but the waters wap and the waves wan. Ah, traitor untrue, said King Arthur, now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened that thou that hast been to me so lief and dear, and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the richness of the sword? But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee I will slay thee with mine own hands; for thou wouldst for my rich sword see me dead. Then Sir Bedivere departed and went to the sword and lightly took it up, and went to the water-side; and there he bound the girdle about the hilts, and then he threw the sword as far into the water as he might; and there came an arm and a hand above the water and met it and caught it, and so shook it thrice and brandished, and then vanished away the hand with the sword in the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the King and told him what he saw. Alas, said the King, help me hence, for I dread I have tarried overlong. Then Sir Bedivere took the King upon his back and so went with him to that water-side. And fast by the bank hove a little barge with many fair ladies in it, and among them all was a queen, and all they had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur. Now put me into the barge, said the King. And so he did softly; and there

received him three queens, with great mourning; and so they set them down, and in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head. And then that queen said, Ah, dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me? Alas, this wound hath caught overmuch cold. And so they rowed from the land. Then Sir Bedivere cried, Ah, my lord Arthur, what shall become of me, now ye go from me and leave me here alone, among mine enemies? Comfort thyself, said the King, and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust for to trust in; for I will unto the vale of Avilion, to heal me of my grievous wound; and if thou hear never more of me, pray for my soul. But ever the queens and ladies wept and shrieked, that it was pity to hear. And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost the sight of the barge, he wept and wailed, and so took the forest; and so he went all that night; and in the morning he was ware betwixt two holts hoar of a chapel and an hermitage. Then was Sir Bedivere glad, and thither he went; and when he came into the chapel he saw where lay an hermit, grovelling on all four, there fast by a tomb was new graven. When the hermit saw Sir Bedivere he knew him well, for he was but little before Bishop of Canterbury, that Sir Mordred flemed. Sir, said Bedivere, what man is here interred that ye pray so fast for? Fair son, said the hermit, I wot not verily, but by deeming. But this night at midnight here came a number of ladies and brought hither a dead corpse and prayed me to bury him; and here they offered an hundred tapers, and they gave me an hundred besants. Alas, said Sir Bedivere, that was my lord King Arthur that here lieth buried in this chapel. Then Sir Bedivere swooned; and when he awoke he prayed the hermit he might abide with him still, to live with fasting and prayers; for from hence will I never go, said Sir Bedivere, by my will, but all the days of my life here to pray for my lord Arthur. Ye are welcome to me, said the hermit, for I know you better than ye ween that I do. Ye are the bold Sir Bedivere, and the full noble duke, Sir Lucan the Butler, was your brother.

So there bode Sir Bedivere with the hermit, and put upon him poor clothes, and served the hermit full lowly in fasting and in prayers.

Thus of Arthur I find never more written in books that be authorised, nor more of the very certainty of his death could I never find, but that ladies brought him to his burial; and such one was buried there that the hermit bare witness, that some time was Bishop of Canterbury, but yet the hermit knew not in certain that he was verily the body of King Arthur. Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesus into another place; and men say that he shall come again and shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall be so, but rather I will say, here in this world he changed his life. But many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse; *HIC JACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS*. And when Queen Guenever understood that King Arthur was slain, and all the noble knights and Sir Mordred, and all the remnant, then the Queen stole away, and five ladies with her, and so she went to Amesbury; and there she let make herself a nun, and ware white clothes and black, and great penance she took as ever did sinful lady in this land, and never creature could make her merry, but lived in fasting, prayers, and alms deeds. And there she was abbess and ruler, as reason would.

And when Sir Lancelot knew that the Queen had made her a nun, he came to take his leave of her, for that he also would do penance while his life should last. And so he departed from her, and took his horse and rode all that day and all night in a forest. And at the last he was ware of an hermitage and a chapel stood between two cliffs; and there he heard a little bell ring to mass, and thither he rode and alit, and tied his horse to the gate, and heard mass; and he that sung mass was the Bishop of Canterbury. The bishop and Sir Bedivere knew Sir Lancelot, and they spake together after mass. But when Sir Bedivere had told his whole tale, Sir Lancelot's heart

almost brast for sorrow; and he kneeled down on his knee, and prayed the bishop to shrive him and assoil him; and then he besought the bishop that he might be his brother. Then the bishop said, I will gladly; and put an habit upon Sir Lancelot, and there he served God day and night with prayers and fastings. Thus he endured in great penance six year. And then Sir Lancelot took the habit of priesthood of the bishop, and a twelvemonth he sang mass. And thus upon a night there came a vision unto Sir Lancelot, and charged him, in remission of his sins, to haste him unto Amesbury; and by then thou come there, thou shalt find Queen Guenever dead. And therefore take thy fellows with thee, and purvey thee of an horse-bier, and fetch thou the corpse of her, and bury her by her husband, the noble King Arthur. Then Sir Lancelot rose up or day, and told the hermit. It were well done, said the hermit, that ye made you ready, and disobey not the advison. Then Sir Lancelot took his seven fellows that abode there with him in prayers and fasting, and on foot they yede from Glastonbury to Amesbury, the which is little more than thirty miles; and thither they came within two days, for they were weak and feeble to go. And when Sir Lancelot was come to Amesbury within the nunnery, Queen Guenever died but half an hour afore. Then Sir Lancelot saw her visage, but he wept not greatly, but sighed. And so he did all the observance of the service himself, both the dirge at night, and on the morn he sang mass. And there was ordained an horse-bier; and so with an hundred torches ever burning about the corpse of the Queen, and ever Sir Lancelot with his seven fellows went about the horse-bier, singing and reading many an holy orison, and frankincense upon the corpse incensed. Thus they came to Glastonbury. And on the morn the hermit sang the mass of requiem with great devotion. And then she was wrapped in cered cloth of Raines in thirty-fold, and after she was put in web of lead, and then in a coffin of marble. And when she was put in the earth Sir Lancelot swooned; and the hermit came

and awaked him, and said, Ye be to blame, for ye displease God with such manner of sorrow-making. Truly, said Sir Lancelot, I trust I do not displease God, for He knoweth mine intent; for my sorrow may never have end; for when I remember of her beauty and of her noblesse that was both with her king and with her, so when I saw his corpse and her corpse so lie together, truly mine heart would not serve to sustain my careful body. Also when I remember me how by my default, mine orgulousness, and my pride that they were both laid full low, that were peerless that ever was living of Christian people, wit you well, said Sir Lancelot, this remembered of their kindness and mine unkindness sank so to mine heart that I might not sustain myself. Then Sir Lancelot never after ate but little meat ne drank, till he was dead; for then he sickened more and more, and dried, and dwined away; and evermore, day and night, he prayed, but sometime he slumbered a broken sleep. So within six weeks after Sir Lancelot fell sick and lay in his bed; and then he sent for the bishop, and said with dreary steven, Sir Bishop, I pray you give to me all my rites that longeth unto a Christian man. So when he was houselled, and anealed, he prayed the bishop that his fellows might bear him to Joyous Gard. (Some men say that it was Alnwick, and some men say it was Bamborough.) And so they went to their beds; and after midnight the hermit, as he lay asleep, fell on a great laughter. And the fellowship awoke and came to the bishop and asked him what he ailed. Why did ye awake me? said the bishop. I was never in all my life so merry and so well at ease. And he told them how that he had seen angels heave Sir Lancelot unto heaven, and the gates of heaven opened against him. It is but dretching of swevens, said Sir Bors, that was of the fellowship; for I doubt not Sir Lancelot aileth nothing but good. So they came to his bed, and they found him stark dead, and he lay as he had smiled. Then was there weeping and wringing of hands, and the greatest dole they made that ever made men. And on the morn the bishop

did his mass of requiem; and after the bishop and they altogether went with the body of Sir Lancelot daily till they came to Joyous Gard; and there they laid his corpse in the body of the quire, and sang and read many psalters and prayers over him. And right then, as they were at their service, there came Sir Ector de Maris, that had seven years sought his brother Sir Lancelot. Then went Sir Bors unto Sir Ector, and told him how there lay his brother, Sir Lancelot, dead. And he fell down in a swoond; and when he waked it were hard any longer to tell the doleful complaints that he made for his brother. Ah, Lancelot, he said, thou wert head of all Christian knights, and now, I dare say there thou liest that thou wert never matched of earthly knight's hand. And thou wert the courteste knight that ever bare shield; and thou wert the truest friend unto thy lover that ever bestrode horse; and thou wert the truest lover, of a sinful man, that ever loved woman; and thou wert the kindest man that ever struck with sword; and thou wert the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights; and thou wast the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall with ladies; and thou wert the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest. Then there was weeping and dolour out of measure. Thus they kept Sir Lancelot's corpse on loft fifteen days, and then they buried it with great devotion. And his fellows drew them to their countries. Here is the end of the whole book of King Arthur, and of his noble knights of the Round Table.

PART II

TENNYSON

I. ELAINE.

[*“Lancelot and Elaine.”*]

Tinct, colour; **Caerlyle**, Carlisle; **Lyonnesse**, the fabled land beneath the sea between Scilly and Cornwall; **Camelot**, Camelford, or Cadbury in Somersetshire; **they prove to him his work**, they are a test of the success of his work; **loops and links**, where the path was lost, and appeared again; **fired from the west**, red with the setting sun; **livest between the lips**, art spoken of by men's lips; **lustihood**, vigour; **rathe**, soon (as in rath-ripe, rather=sooner); **Pendragon**, supreme commander; **crescent**, growing up, becoming great; **ramp**, stand on hind legs; **predoom'd**, judged beforehand; **battle-writhen**, with knotted muscles, like the roots of a gnarled oak; **that I live to hear is yours**, I owe you my life; **from the half-face to the full eye**, his face had been sideways towards them, but he now turned and faced them full.

ELAINE the fair, Elaine the loveable,
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the east
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot;
Which first she placed where morning's earliest ray
Might strike it, and awake her with the gleam;
Then fearing rust or soilure fashion'd for it
A case of silk, and braided thereupon
All the devices blazon'd on the shield
In their own tinct, and added, of her wit,
A border fantasy of branch and flower,
And yellow-throated nestling in the nest.
Nor rested thus content, but day by day,

Leaving her household and good father, climb'd
That eastern tower, and entering barr'd her door,
Stript off the case, and read the naked shield,
Now guess'd a hidden meaning in his arms,
Now made a pretty history to herself
Of every dint a sword had beaten in it,
And every scratch a lance had made upon it,
Conjecturing when and where: this cut is fresh;
That ten years back; this dealt him at Caerlyle;
That at Caerleon; this at Camelot:
And ah God's mercy, what a stroke was there!
And here a thrust that might have kill'd, but God
Broke the strong lance, and roll'd his enemy down,
And saved him: so she lived in fantasy.

How came the lily maid by that good shield
Of Lancelot, she that knew not ev'n his name?
He left it with her, when he rode to tilt
For the great diamond in the diamond jousts,
Which Arthur had ordain'd, and by that name
Had named them, since a diamond was the prize.

For Arthur when none knew from whence he came,
Long ere the people chose him for their King,
Roving the trackless realms of Lyonesse,
Had found a glen, gray boulder and black tarn.
A horror lived about the tarn, and clave
Like its own mists to all the mountain side:
For here two brothers, one a king, had met
And fought together; but their names were lost;
And each had slain his brother at a blow;
And down they fell and made the glen abhorr'd:
And there they lay till all their bones were bleach'd,
And lichen'd into colour with the crags:
And one of these, the King, had on a crown
Of diamonds, one in front, and four aside.
And Arthur came, and labouring up the pass,
All in a misty moonshine, unawares
Had trodden that crown'd skeleton, and the skull
Brake from the nape, and from the skull the crown
Roll'd into light, and turning on its rims

Fled like a glittering rivulet to the tarn :
And down the shingly scaur he plunged, and caught,
And set it on his head, and in his heart
Heard murmurs, ' Lo, thou likewise shalt be King.'

Thereafter, when a King, he had the gems
Pluck'd from the crown, and show'd them to his
knights,

Saying, ' These jewels, whereupon I chanced
Divinely, are the kingdom's not the King's—
For public use; henceforward let there be,
Once every year, a joust for one of these :
For so by nine years' proof we needs must learn
Which is our mightiest, and ourselves shall grow
In use of arms and manhood, till we drive
The heathen, who, some say, shall rule the land
Hereafter, which God hinder.' Thus he spoke :
And eight years past, eight jousts had been, and still
Had Lancelot won the diamond of the year,
With purposc to present them to the Queen,
When all were won; but meaning all at once
To snare her royal fancy with a boon
Worth half her realm, had never spoken word.

Now for the central diamond and the last
And largest, Arthur, holding then his court
Hard on the river nigh the place which now
Is this world's hugest, let proclaim a joust
At Camelot, and when the time drew nigh
Spake (for she had been sick) to Guinevere,
' Are you so sick, my Queen, you cannot move
To these fair jousts?' ' Yea, lord,' she said, ' you
know it.'

' Then will you miss,' he answer'd, ' the great deeds
Of Lancelot, and his prowess in the lists,
A sight you love to look on.' And the Queen
Lifted her eyes, and they dwelt languidly
On Lancelot, where he stood beside the King.
He thinking that he read her meaning there,
' Stay with me, I am sick; my love is more
Than many diamonds,' yielded; and a heart

Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen
(However much he yearn'd to make complete
The tale of diamonds for his destined boon)
Urged him to speak against the truth, and say,
' Sir King, mine ancient wound is hardly whole,
And lets me from the saddle ' ; and the King
Glanced first at him, then her, and went his way.
No sooner gone than suddenly she began :

' To blame, my lord Sir Lancelot, much to blame !
Why go you not to these fair jousts ? the knights
Are half of them our enemies, and the crowd
Will murmur, " Lo the shameless ones, who take
Their pastime now the trustful King is gone ! " '

Then Lancelot vext at having lied in vain :
' Are you so wise ? you were not once so wise,
My Queen, that summer, when you loved me first.
Then of the crowd you took no more account
Than of the myriad cricket of the mead,
When its own voice clings to each blade of grass,
And every voice is nothing. As to knights,
Them surely can I silence with all ease.
But now my loyal worship is allow'd
Of all men : many a bard, without offence,
Has link'd our names together in his lay,
Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere,
The pearl of beauty : and our knights at feast
Have pledged us in this union, while the King
Would listen smiling. How then ? is there more ?
Has Arthur spoken aught ? or would yourself,
Now weary of my service and devoir,
Henceforth be truer to your faultless lord ? '

She broke into a little scornful laugh :
' Arthur, my lord, Arthur, the faultless King,
That passionate perfection, my good lord—
But who can gaze upon the Sun in heaven ?
He never spake word of reproach to me,
He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,
He cares not for me : only here to-day
There gleam'd a vague suspicion in his eyes :

Some meddling rogue has tamper'd with him—else
Rapt in this fancy of his Table Round,
And swearing men to vows impossible,
To make them like himself: but, friend, to me
He is all fault who hath no fault at all:
For who loves me must have a touch of earth;
The low sun makes the colour: I am yours,
Not Arthur's, as you know, save by the bond.
And therefore hear my words: go to the jousts:
The tiny-trumpeting gnat can break our dream
When sweetest; and the vermin voices here
May buzz so loud—we scorn them, but they sting.'

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights:
'And with what face, after my pretext made,
Shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot, I
Before a King who honours his own word,
As if it were his God's?'

'Yea,' said the Queen,
'A moral child without the craft to rule,
Else had he not lost me: but listen to me,
If I must find you wit: we hear it said
That men go down before your spear at a touch,
But knowing you are Lancelot; your great name,
This conquers: hide it therefore; go unknown:
Win! by this kiss you will: and our true King
Will then allow your pretext, O my knight,
As all for glory; for to speak him true,
You know right well, how meek soe'er he seem,
No keener hunter after glory breathes.
He loves it in his knights more than himself:
They prove to him his work: win and return.'

Then got Sir Lancelot suddenly to horse,
Wroth at himself. Not willing to be known,
He left the barren-beaten thoroughfare,
Chose the green path that show'd the rarer foot,
And there among the solitary downs,
Full often lost in fancy, lost his way;
Till as he traced a faintly-shadow'd track,

That all in loops and links among the dales
Ran to the Castle of Astolat, he saw
Fired from the west, far on a hill, the towers.
Thither he made, and wound the gateway horn.
There came an old, dumb, myriad-wrinkled man,
Who let him into lodging and disarm'd.
And Lancelot marvell'd at the wordless man;
And issuing found the Lord of Astolat
With two strong sons, Sir Torre and Sir Lavaine,
Moving to meet him in the castle court;
And close behind them stept the lily maid
Elaine, his daughter: mother of the house
There was not: some light jest among them rose
With laughter dying down as the great knight
Approach'd them: then the Lord of Astolat;
'Whence comest thou, my guest, and by what name
Livest between the lips? for by thy state
And presence I might guess thee chief of those,
After the King, who eat in Arthur's halls.
Him have I seen: the rest, his Table Round,
Known as they are, to me they are unknown.'

Then answer'd Lancelot, the chief of knights:
'Known am I, and of Arthur's hall, and known,
What I by mere mischance have brought, my shield.
But since I go to joust as one unknown
At Camelot for the diamond, ask me not,
Hereafter ye shall know me—and the shield—
I pray you lend me one, if such you have,
Blank, or at least with some device not mine.'

Then said the Lord of Astolat, 'Here is Torre's:
Hurt in his first tilt was my son, Sir Torre.
And so, God wot, his shield is blank enough.
His ye can have.' Then added plain Sir Torre,
'Yea, since I cannot use it, ye may have it.'
Here laugh'd the father saying, 'Fie, Sir Churl,
Is that an answer for a noble knight?
Allow him! but Lavaine, my younger here,
He is so full of lustihood, he will ride,

Joust for it, and win, and bring it in an hour,
And set it in this damsel's golden hair,
To make her thrice as wilful as before.'

'Nay, father, nay, good father, shame me not
Before this noble knight,' said young Lavaine,
'For nothing. Surely I but play'd on Torre:
He seem'd so sullen, vext he could not go:
A jest, no more! for, knight, the maiden dreamt
That some one put this diamond in her hand,
And that it was too slippery to be held,
And slipt and fell into some pool or stream,
The castle-well, belike; and then I said
That *if* I went and *if* I fought and won it
(But all was jest and joke among ourselves)
Then must she keep it safelier. All was jest.
But, father, give me leave, an if he will,
To ride to Camelot with this noble knight:
Win shall I not, but do my best to win:
Young as I am, yet would I do my best.'

'So you will grace me,' answer'd Lancelot,
Smiling a moment, 'with your fellowship
O'er these waste downs whereon I lost myself,
Then were I glad of you as guide and friend:
And you shall win this diamond—as I hear,
It is a fair large diamond,—if you may,
And yield it to this maiden, if you will.'
'A fair large diamond,' added plain Sir Torre,
'Such be for queens, and not for simple maids.'
Then she, who held her eyes upon the ground,
Elaine, and heard her name so tost about,
Flush'd slightly at the slight disparagement
Before the stranger knight, who, looking at her,
Full courtly, yet not falsely, thus return'd:
'If what is fair be but for what is fair,
And only queens are to be counted so,
Rash were my judgment then, who deem this maid
Might wear as fair a jewel as is on earth,
Not violating the bond of like to like.'

He spoke and ceased : the lily maid Elaine,
Won by the mellow voice before she look'd,
Lifted her eyes, and read his lineaments.
The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,
In battle with the love he bare his lord,
Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his' time.
Another sinning on such heights with one,
The flower of all the west and all the world,
Had been the sleeker for it : but in him
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose
And drove him into wastes and solitudes
For agony, who was yet a living soul.
Marr'd as he was, he seem'd the goodliest man
That ever among ladies ate in hall,
And noblest, when she lifted up her eyes.
However marr'd, of more than twice her years,
Seam'd with an ancient swordcut on the cheek,
And bruised and bronzed, she lifted up her eyes
And loved him, with that love which was her doom.

Then the great knight, the darling of the court,
Loved of the loveliest, into that rude hall
Stept with all grace, and not with half disdain
Hid under grace, as in a smaller time,
But kindly man moving among his kind :
Whom they with meats and vintage of their best
And talk and minstrel melody entertain'd.
And much they ask'd of court and Table Round,
And ever well and readily answer'd he :
But Lancelot, when they glanced at Guinevere,
Suddenly speaking of the wordless man,
Heard from the Baron that, ten years before,
The heathen caught and reft him of his tongue.
'He learnt and warn'd me of their fierce design
Against my house, and him they caught and maim'd;
But I, my sons, and little daughter fled
From bonds or death, and dwelt among the woods
By the great river in a boatman's hut.
Dull days were those, till our good Arthur broke
The Pagan yet once more on Badon Hill.'

' O there, great lord, doubtless,' Lavaine said, rapt
By all the sweet and sudden passion of youth
Towards greatness in its elder, ' you have fought.
O tell us—for we live apart—you know
Of Arthur's glorious wars.' And Lancelot spoke
And answered him at full, as having been
With Arthur in the fight which all day long
Rang by the white mouth of the violent Glem;
And in the four wild battles by the shore
Of Duglas; that on Bassa; then the war
That thunder'd in and out the gloomy skirts
Of Celidon the forest; and again
By castle Gurnion, where the glorious King
Had on his cuirass worn our Lady's Head,
Carved of one emerald center'd in a sun
Of silver rays, that lighten'd as he breathed;
And at Caerleon had he help'd his lord,
When the strong neighings of the wild white Horse
Set every gilded parapet shuddering;
And up in Agned Cathregonion too,
And down the waste sand-shores of Trath Treroit,
Where many a heathen fell; ' and on the mount
Of Badon I myself beheld the King
Charge at the head of all his Table Round,
And all his legions crying Christ and him,
And break them; and I saw him, after, stand
High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume
Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,
And seeing me, with a great voice he cried,
" They are broken, they are broken ! " for the King,
However mild he seems at home, nor cares
For triumph in our mimic wars, the jousts—
For if his own knight cast him down, he laughs
Saying, his knights are better men than he—
Yet in this heathen war the fire of God
Fills him: I never saw his like: there lives
No greater leader.'

While he utter'd this,
Low to her own heart said the lily maid,
' Save your great self, fair lord ' ; and when he fell
From talk of war to traits of pleasantry—

Being mirthful he, but in a stately kind—
She still took note that when the living smile
Died from his lips, across him came a cloud
Of melancholy severe, from which again,
Whenever in her hovering to and fro
The lily maid had striven to make him cheer,
There brake a sudden-beaming tenderness
Of manners and of nature: and she thought
That all was nature, all, perchance, for her.
And all night long his face before her lived,
As when a painter, poring on a face,
Divinely thro' all hindrance finds the man
Behind it, and so paints him that his face,
The shape and colour of a mind and life,
Lives for his children, ever at its best
And fullest; so the face before her lived,
Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full
Of noble things, and held her from her sleep.
Till rathe she rose, half-cheated in the thought
She needs must bid farewell to sweet Lavaine.
First as in fear, step after step, she stole
Down the long tower-stairs, hesitating:
Anon, she heard Sir Lancelot cry in the court,
'This shield, my friend, where is it?' and Lavaine
Past inward, as she came from out the tower.
There to his proud horse Lancelot turn'd, and smooth'd
The glossy shoulder, humming to himself.
Half-envious of the flattering hand, she drew
Nearer and stood. He look'd, and more amazed
Than if seven men had set upon him, saw
The maiden standing in the dewy light.
He had not dream'd she was so beautiful.
Then came on him a sort of sacred fear,
For silent, tho' he greeted her, she stood
Rapt on his face as if it were a God's.
Suddenly flash'd on her a wild desire,
That he should wear her favour at the tilt.
She braved a riotous heart in asking for it.
'Fair lord, whose name I know not—noble it is,
I well believe, the noblest—will you wear
My favour at this tourney?' 'Nay,' said he,

'Fair lady, since I never yet have worn
Favour of any lady in the lists.
Such is my wont, as those, who know me, know.'
'Yea, so,' she answer'd; 'then in wearing mine
Needs must be lesser likelihood, noble lord,
That those who know should know you.' And he
turn'd

Her counsel up and down within his mind,
And found it true, and answer'd, 'True, my child.
Well, I will wear it: fetch it out to me:
What is it?' and she told him 'A red sleeve
Broider'd with pearls,' and brought it: then he bound
Her token on his helmet, with a smile
Saying, 'I never yet have done so much
For any maiden living,' and the blood
Sprang to her face and fill'd her with delight;
But left her all the paler, when Lavaine
Returning brought the yet-unblazon'd shield,
His brother's; which he gave to Lancelot,
Who parted with his own to fair Elaine:
'Do me this grace, my child, to have my shield
In keeping till I come.' 'A grace to me,'
She answer'd, 'twice to-day. I am your squire.'
Whereat Lavaine said, laughing, 'Lily maid,
For fear our people call you lily maid
In earnest, let me bring your colour back;
Once, twice, and thrice: now get you hence to bed':
So kiss'd her, and Sir Lancelot his own hand,
And thus they moved away: she stay'd a minute
Then made a sudden step to the gate, and there—
Her bright hair blown about the serious face
Yêt rosy-kindled with her brother's kiss—
Paused in the gateway, standing near the shield
In silence, while she watch'd their arms far-off
Sparkle, until they dipt below the downs.
Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield,
There kept it, and so lived in fantasy.

Meanwhile the new companions past away
Far o'er the long backs of the bushless downs,
To where Sir Lancelot knew there lived a knight

Not far from Camelot, now for forty years
A hermit, who had pray'd, labour'd and pray'd,
And ever labouring had scoop'd himself
In the white rock a chapel and a hall
On inassive columns, like a shorecliff cave,
And cells and chambers: all were fair and dry;
The green light from the meadows underneath
Struck up and lived along the milky roofs;
And in the meadows tremulous aspen-trees
And poplars made a noise of falling showers.
And thither wending there that night they bode.

But when the next day broke from underground,
And shot red fire and shadows thro' the cave,
They rose, heard mass, broke fast, and rode away:
Then Lancelot saying, 'Hear, but hold my name
Hidden, you ride with Lancelot of the Lake,'
Abash'd Lavaine, whose instant reverence,
Dearer to true young hearts than their own praise,
But left him leave to stammer, 'Is it indeed?'
And after muttering 'The great Lancelot,'
At last he got his breath and answer'd, 'One,
One have I seen—that other, our liege lord,
The dread Pendragon, Britain's King of kings,
Of whom the people talk mysteriously,
He will be there—then were I stricken blind
That minute, I might say that I had seen.'

So spake Lavaine, and when they reach'd the lists
By Camelot in the meadow, let his eyes
Run thro' the peopled gallery which half round
Lay like a rainbow fall'n upon the grass,
Until they found the clear-faced King, who sat
Robed in red samite, easily to be known,
Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,
And from the carven-work behind him crept
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them
Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable
Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found

The new design wherein they lost themselves,
Yet with all ease, so tender was the work :
And, in the costly canopy o'er him set,
Blazed the last diamond of the nameless king.

Then Lancelot answer'd young Lavaine and said,
' Me you call great : mine is the firmer seat,
The truer lance : but there is many a youth
Now crescent, who will come to all I am
And overcome it ; and in me there dwells
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch
Of greatness to know well I am not great :
There is the man.' And Lavaine gaped upon him
As on a thing miraculous, and anon
The trumpets blew ; and then did either side,
They that assail'd, and they that held the lists,
Set lance in rest, strike spur, suddenly move,
Meet in the midst, and there so furiously
Shock, that a man far-off might well perceive,
If any man that day were left afield,
The hard earth shake, and a low thunder of arms.
And Lancelot bode a little, till he saw
Which were the weaker ; then he hurl'd into it,
Against the stronger : little need to speak
Of Lancelot in his glory ! King, duke, earl,
Count, baron—whom he smote, he overthrew.

But in the field were Lancelot's kith and kin,
Ranged with the Table Round that held the lists,
Strong men, and wrathful that a stranger knight
Should do and almost overdo the deeds
Of Lancelot ; and one said to the other, ' Lo !
What is he ? I do not mean the force alone—
The grace and versatility of the man—
Is it not Lancelot ? ' ' When has Lancelot worn
Favour of any lady in the lists ?
Not such his wont, as we, that know him, know.'
' How then ? who then ? ' a fury seized on them,
A fiery family passion for the name
Of Lancelot, and a glory one with theirs.

They couch'd their spears and prick'd their steeds,
and thus,
Their plumes driv'n backward by the wind they made
In moving, all together down upon him
Bare, as a wild wave in the wide North-sea,
Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears, with all
Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies,
Down on a bark, and overbears the bark,
And him that helms it, so they overbore
Sir Lancelot and his charger, and a spear
Down-glancing lamed the charger, and a spear
Prick'd sharply his own cuirass, and the head
Pierced thro' his side, and there snapt, and remained.

Then Sir Lavaine did well and worshipfully;
He bore a knight of old repute to the earth,
And brought his horse to Lancelot where he lay.
He up the side, sweating with agony, got,
But thought to do while he might yet endure,
And being lustily holpen by the rest,
His party,—tho' it seem'd half-miracle
To those he fought with,—drave his kith and kin,
And all the Table Round that held the lists,
Back to the barrier; then the trumpets blew
Proclaiming his the prize, who wore the sleeve
Of scarlet, and the pearls; and all the knights,
His party, cried 'Advance and take your prize
The diamond'; but he answer'd, 'Diamond me
No diamonds! for God's love, a little air!
Prize me no prizes, for my prize is death!
Hence will I, and I charge you, follow me not.'

He spoke, and vanish'd suddenly from the field
With young Lavaine into the poplar grove.
There from his charger down he slid, and sat,
Gasping to Sir Lavaine, 'Draw the lancehead':
'Ah my sweet lord Sir Lancelot,' said Lavaine,
'I dread me, if I draw it, you will die.'
But he, 'I die already with it: draw—
Draw,'—and Lavaine drew, and Sir Lancelot gave
A marvellous great shriek and ghastly groan,
And half his blood burst forth, and down he sank

For the pure pain, and wholly swoon'd away.
Then came the hermit out and bare him in,
There stanch'd his wound; and there, in daily doubt
Whether to live or die, for many a week
Hid from the wide world's rumour by the grove
Of poplars with their noise of falling showers,
And ever-tremulous aspen-trees, he lay.

But on that day when Lancelot fled the lists,
His party, knights of utmost North and West,
Lords of waste marches, kings of desolate isles,
Came round their great Pendragon, saying to him,
'Lo, Sire, our knight, thro' whom we won the day,
Hath gone sore wounded, and hath left his prize
Untaken, crying that his prize is death.'
'Heaven hinder,' said the King, 'that such an one,
So great a knight as we have seen to-day—
He seem'd to me another Lancelot—
Yea, twenty times I thought him Lancelot—
He must not pass uncared for. Gawain, rise,
My nephew, and ride forth and find the knight.
Wounded and wearied, needs must he be near.
I charge you that you get at once to horse.
And, knights and kings, there breathes not one of you
Will deem this prize of ours is rashly given:
His prowess was too wondrous. We will do him
No customary honour: since the knight
Came not to us, of us to claim the prize,
Ourselves will send it after. Wherefore take
This diamond, and deliver it, and return,
And bring us what he is, and how he fares,
And cease not from your quest until ye find.'

So saying, from the carven flower above,
To which it made a restless heart, he took,
And gave, the diamond: then from where he sat
At Arthur's right, with smiling face arose,
With smiling face and frowning heart, a Prince
In the mid might and flourish of his May,
Gawain, surnamed The Courteous, fair and strong,
And after Lancelot, Tristram, and Geraint

And Lamorack, a good knight, but therewithal
Sir Modred's brother, of a crafty house,
Nor often loyal to his word, and now
Wroth that the King's command to sally forth
In quest of whom he knew not, made him leave
The banquet, and concourse of knights and kings.

So all in wrath he got to horse and went;
While Arthur to the banquet, dark in mood,
Past, thinking 'Is it Lancelot who has come
Despite the wound he spake of, all for gain
Of glory, and has added wound to wound,
And ridd'n away to die?' So fear'd the King,
And, after two days' tarriance there, return'd.
Then when he saw the Queen, embracing ask'd,
'Love, are you yet so sick?' 'Nay, lord,' she said.
'And where is Lancelot?' Then the Queen amazed,
'Was he not with you? won he not your prize?'
'Nay, but one like him.' 'Why that like was he.'
And when the King demanded how she knew,
Said, 'Lord, no sooner had ye parted from us,
Than Lancelot told me of a common talk
That men went down before his spear at a touch,
But knowing he was Lancelot; his great name
Conquer'd; and therefore would he hide his name
From all men, ev'n the King, and to this end
Had made the pretext of a hindering wound,
That he might joust unknown of all, and learn
If his old prowess were in aught decay'd;
And added, "Our true Arthur, when he learns,
Will well allow my pretext, as for gain
Of purer glory."'

Then replied the King :
'Far lovelier in our Lancelot had it been,
In lieu of idly dallying with the truth,
To have trusted me as he has trusted you.
Surely his king and most familiar friend
Might well have kept his secret. True, indeed,
Albeit I know my knights fantastical,
So fine a fear in our large Lancelot
Must needs have moved my laughter : now remains

But little cause for laughter : his own kin—
Ill news, my Queen, for all who love him, these !—
His kith and kin, not knowing, set upon him ;
So that he went sore wounded from the field :
Yet good news too : for goodly hopes are mine
That Lancelot is no more a lonely heart.
He wore, against his wont, upon his helm
A sleeve of scarlet, broider'd with great pearls,
Some gentle maiden's gift.'

' Yea, lord,' she said,
' Thy hopes are mine,' and saying that, she choked,
And sharply turn'd about to hide her face,
Moved to her chamber, and there flung herself
Down on the great King's couch, and writhed upon it,
And clench'd her fingers till they bit the palm,
And shriek'd out ' Traitor ' to the unhearing wall,
Then flash'd into wild tears, and rose again,
And moved about her palace, proud and pale.

Gawain the while thro' all the region round
Rode with his diamond, wearied of the quest,
Touch'd at all points, except the poplar grove,
And came at last, tho' late, to Astolat :
Whom glittering in enamell'd arms the maid
Glanced at, and cried, ' What news from Camelot,
lord ?

What of the knight with the red sleeve ? ' ' He won.'
' I knew it,' she said. ' But parted from the jousts
Hurt in the side,' whereat she caught her breath ;
Thro' her own side she felt the sharp lance go ;
Thereon she smote her hand : wellnigh she swoon'd :
And, while he gazed wonderingly at her, came
The Lord of Astolat out, to whom the Prince
Reported who he was, and on what quest
Sent, that he bore the prize and could not find
The victor, but had ridd'n wildly round
To seek him, and was wearied of the search.
To whom the Lord of Astolat, ' Bide with us,
And ride no longer wildly, noble Prince !
Here was the knight, and here he left a shield ;
This will he send or come for : furthermore

Our son is with him; we shall hear anon,
Needs must we hear.' To this the courteous Prince
Accorded with his wonted courtesy,
Courtesy with a touch of traitor in it,
And stayed; and cast his eyes on fair Elaine:
Where could be found face daintier? then her shape
From forehead down to foot, perfect—again
From foot to forehead exquisitely turn'd:
'Well—if I bide, lo! this wild flower for me!'
And oft they met among the garden yews,
And there he set himself to play upon her
With sallying wit, free flashes from a height
Above her, graces of the court, and songs,
Sighs, and slow smiles, and golden eloquence
And amorous adulations, till the maid
Rebell'd against it, saying to him, 'Prince,
O loyal nephew of our noble King,
Why ask ye not to see the shield he left,
Whence you might learn his name? Why slight your
King,
And lose the quest he sent you on, and prove
No surer than our falcon yesterday,
Who lost the hern we slipt him at, and went
To all the winds?' 'Nay by mine head,' said he,
'I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven,
O damsel, in the light of your blue eyes;
But an you will it let me see the shield.'
And when the shield was brought, and Gawain saw
Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold,
Ramp in the field, he smote his thigh, and mock'd:
'Right was the King! our Lancelot! that true man!'
'And right was I,' she answer'd merrily, 'I
Who dream'd my knight the greatest knight of all.'
'And if I dreamed,' said Gawain, 'that you love
This greatest knight, your pardon! lo, you know it!
Speak therefore: shall I waste myself in vain?'
Full simple was her answer, 'What know I?
My brethren have been all my fellowship;
And I, when often they have talk'd of love,
Wish'd it had been my mother, for they talk'd,
Meseem'd, of what they knew not; so myself—

I know not if I know what true love is,
But if I know, then, if I love not him,
Methinks there is none other I can love.'
'Yea, by God's death,' said he, 'you love him well,
But would not, knew ye what all others know, '
And whom he loves.' 'So be it,' cried Elaine,
And lifted her fair face and moved away :
But he pursued her, calling, 'Stay a little !
One golden minute's grace ! he wore your sleeve :
Would he break faith with one I may not name ?
Must our true man change like a leaf at last ?
May it be so ? why then, far be it from me
To cross our mighty Lancelot in his loves !
And, damsel, for I deem you know full well
Where your great knight is hidden, let me leave
My quest with you ; the diamond also : here !
For if you love, it will be sweet to give it ;
And if he love, it will be sweet to have it
From your own hand ; and whether he love or not,
A diamond is a diamond. Fare you well
A thousand times !—a thousand times farewell !
Yet, if he love, and his love hold, we two
May meet at court hereafter : there, I think,
So you will learn the courtesies of the court,
We two shall know each other.'

Then he gave,
And slightly kiss'd the hand to which he gave,
The diamond, and all wearied of the quest
Leapt on his horse, and carolling as he went
A true-love ballad, lightly rode away.

Thence to the court he past ; there told the King
What the King knew, 'Sir Lancelot is the knight.'
And added, 'Sire, my liege, so much I learnt ;
But fail'd to find him, tho' I rode all round
The region : but I lighted on the maid
Whose sleeve he wore ; she loves him ; and to her,
Deeming our courtesy is the truest law,
I gave the diamond : she will render it ;
For by mine head she knows his hiding-place.'

The seldom-frowning King frown'd, and replied,
'Too courteous truly! you shall go no more
On quest of mine, seeing that you forget
Obedience is the courtesy due to kings.'

He spake and parted. Wroth, but all in awe,
For twenty strokes of the blood, without a word,
Linger'd that other, staring after him;
Then shook his hair, strode off, and buzz'd abroad
About the maid of Astolat, and her love.
All ears were prick'd at once, all tongues were loosed :
'The maid of Astolat loves Sir Lancelot,
Sir Lancelot loves the maid of Astolat.'
Some read the King's face, some the Queen's, and all
Had marvel what the maid might be, but most
Predoom'd her as unworthy. One old dame
Came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news.
She, that had heard the noise of it before,
But sorrowing Lancelot should have stoop'd so low,
Marr'd her friend's point with pale tranquillity.
So ran the tale like fire about the court,
Fire in dry stubble a nine-days' wonder flared :
Till ev'n the knights at banquet twice or thrice
Forgot to drink to Lancelot and the Queen,
And pledging Lancelot and the lily maid
Smiled at each other, while the Queen, who sat
With lips severely placid, felt the knot
Climb in her throat, and with her feet unseen
Crush'd the wild passion out against the floor
Beneath the banquet, where the meats became
As wormwood, and she hated all who pledged.

But far away the maid in Astolat,
Her guiltless rival, she that ever kept
The one-day-seen Sir Lancelot in her heart,
Crept to her father, while he mused alone,
Sat on his knee, stroked his gray face and said,
'Father, you call me wilful, and the fault
Is yours who let me have my will, and now,
Sweet father, will you let me lose my wits?'
'Nay,' said he, 'surely.' 'Wherefore, let me hence,'

She answer'd, 'and find out our dear Lavaine.'
'You will not lose your wits for dear Lavaine :
Bide,' answer'd he : 'we needs must hear anon
Of him, and of that other.' 'Ay,' she said,
'And of that other, for I needs must hence
And find that other, wheresoe'er he be,
And with mine own hand give his diamond to him,
Lest I be found as faithless in the quest
As yon proud Prince who left the quest to me.
Sweet father, I behold him in my dreams
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Death-pale, for lack of gentle maiden's aid.
The gentler-born the maiden, the more bound,
My father, to be sweet and serviceable
To noble knights in sickness, as ye know
When these have worn their tokens : let me hence
I pray you.' Then her father nodding said,
'Ay, ay, the diamond : wit you well, my child,
Right fain were I to learn this knight were whole,
Being our greatest : yea, and you must give it—
And sure I think this fruit is hung too high
For any mouth to gape for save a queen's—
Nay, I mean nothing : so then, get you gone,
Being so very wilful you must go.'

Lightly, her suit allow'd, she slipt away,
And while she made her ready for her ride,
Her father's latest word humm'd in her ear,
'Being so very wilful you must go,'
And changed itself and echo'd in her heart,
'Being so very wilful you must die.'
But she was happy enough and shook it off,
As we shake off the bee that buzzes at us ;
And in her heart she answer'd it and said,
'What matter, so I help him back to life ?'
Then far away with good Sir Torre for guide
Rode o'er the long backs of the bushless downs
To Camelot, and before the city-gates
Came on her brother with a happy face
Making a roan horse caper and curvet
For pleasure all about a field of flowers :

Whom when she saw, 'Lavaine,' she cried, 'Lavaine,
How fares my lord Sir Lancelot?' He amazed,
'Torre and Elaine! why here? Sir Lancelot!
How know you my lord's name is Lancelot?'
But when the maid had told him all her tale,
Then turn'd Sir Torre, and being in his moods
Left them, and under the strange-statued gate,
Where Arthur's wars were render'd mystically,
Past up the still rich city to his kin,
His own far blood, which dwelt at Camelot;
And her, Lavaine across the poplar grove
Led to the caves: there first she saw the casque
Of Lancelot on the wall: her scarlet sleeve,
Tho' carved and cut, and half the pearls away,
Stream'd from it still; and in her heart she laugh'd,
Because he had not loosed it from his helm,
But meant once more perchance to tourney in it.
And when they gain'd the cell in which he slept,
His battle-writhen arms and mighty hands
Lay naked on the wolfskin, and a dream
Of dragging down his enemy made them move.
Then she that saw him lying unsleek, unshorn,
Gaunt as it were the skeleton of himself,
Utter'd a little tender dolorous cry.
The sound not wonted in a place so still
Woke the sick knight, and while he roll'd his eyes
Yet blank from sleep, she started to him, saying,
'Your prize the diamond sent you by the King':
His eyes glisten'd: she fancied 'Is it for me?'
And when the maid had told him all the tale
Of King and Prince, the diamond sent, the quest
Assign'd to her not worthy of it, she knelt
Full lowly by the corners of his bed,
And laid the diamond in his open hand.
Her face was near, and as we kiss the child
That does the task assign'd, he kiss'd her face.
At once she slipt like water to the floor.
'Alas,' he said, 'your ride has wearied you.
Rest must you have.' 'No rest for me,' she said;
'Nay, for near you, fair lord, I am at rest.'
What might she mean by that? his large black eyes,

Yet larger thro' his leanness, dwelt upon her,
Till all her heart's sad secret blazed itself
In the heart's colours on her simple face;
And Lancelot look'd and was perplexed in mind,
And being weak in body said no more;
But did not love the colour; woman's love,
Save one, he not regarded, and so turn'd
Sighing, and feign'd a sleep until he slept.

Then rose Elaine and glided thro' the fields,
And past beneath the wildly-sculptured gates
Far up the dim rich city to her kin;
There bode the night: but woke with dawn, and past
Down thro' the dim rich city to the fields,
Thence to the cave: so day by day she past
In either twilight ghost-like to and fro
Gliding, and every day she tended him,
And likewise many a night: and Lancelot
Would, tho' he call'd his wound a little hurt
Whereof he should be quickly whole, at times
Brain-feverous in his heat and agony, seem
Uncourteous, even he: but the meek maid
Sweetly forbore him ever, being to him
Meeker than any child to a rough nurse,
Milder than any mother to a sick child,
And never woman yet, since man's first fall,
Did kindlier unto man, but her deep love
Upbore her; till the hermit, skill'd in all
The simples and the science of that time,
Told him that her fine care had saved his life.
And the sick man forgot her simple blush,
Would call her friend and sister, sweet Elaine,
Would listen for her coming and regret
Her parting step, and held her tenderly,
And loved her with all love except the love
Of man and woman when they love their best,
Closest and sweetest, and had died the death
In any knightly fashion for her sake.
And peradventure had he seen her first
She might have made this and that other world
Another world for the sick man; but now

The shackles of an old love straiten'd him;
His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

Yet the great knight in his mid-sickness made
Full many a holy vow and pure resolve.
These, as but born of sickness, could not live:
For when the blood ran lustier in him again,
Full often the sweet image of one face,
Making a treacherous quiet in his heart,
Dispersed his resolution like a cloud.
Then if the maiden, while that ghostly grace
Beam'd on his fancy, spoke, he answer'd not,
Or short and coldly, and she knew right well
What the rough sickness meant, but what this meant
She knew not, and the sorrow dimm'd her sight,
And drave her ere her time across the fields
Far into the rich city, where alone
She murmur'd, 'Vain, in vain: it cannot be.
He will not love me: how then? must I die?'
Then as a little helpless innocent bird,
That has but one plain passage of few notes,
Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er
For all an April morning, till the ear
Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid
Went half the night repeating, 'Must I die?'
And now to right she turn'd, and now to left,
And found no ease in turning or in rest;
And 'him or death,' she mutter'd, 'death or him,'
Again and like a burthen, 'him or death.'

But when Sir Lancelot's deadly hurt was whole,
To Astolat returning rode the three.
There morn by morn, arraying her sweet self
In that wherein she deem'd she look'd her best,
She came before Sir Lancelot, for she thought
'If I be loved, these are my festal robes,
If not, the victim's flowers before he fall.'
And Lancelot ever prest upon the maid
That she should ask some goodly gift of him
For her own self or hers; 'and do not shun

To speak the wish most near to your true heart;
Such service have you done me, that I make
My will of yours, and Prince and Lord am I
In mine own land, and what I will I can.'
Then like a ghost she lifted up her face,
But like a ghost without the power to speak.
And Lancelot saw that she withheld her wish,
And bode among them yet a little space
Till he should learn it; and one morn it chanced
He found her in among the garden yews,
And said, 'Delay no longer, speak your wish,
Seeing I must go to-day': then out she brake:
'Going? and we shall never see you more.
And I must die for want of one bold word.'
'Speak: that I live to hear,' he said, 'is yours.'
Then suddenly and passionately she spoke:
'I have gone mad. I love you: let me die.'
'Ah, sister,' answer'd Lancelot, 'what is this?'
And innocently extending her white arms,
'Your love,' she said, 'your love—to be your wife.'
And Lancelot answer'd, 'Had I chosen to wed,
I had been wedded earlier, sweet Elaine:
But now there never will be wife of mine.'
'No, no,' she cried, 'I care not to be wife,
But to be with you still, to see your face,
To serve you, and to follow you thro' the world.'
And Lancelot answer'd, 'Nay, the world, the world,
All ear and eye, with such a stupid heart
To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue
To blare its own interpretation—nay
Full ill then should I quit your brother's love,
And your good father's kindness.' And she said,
'Not to be with you, not to see your face—
Alas for me then, my good days are done.'
'Nay, noble maid,' he answer'd, 'ten times nay!
This is not love: but love's first flash in youth,
Most common: yea, I know it of mine own self:
And you yourself will smile at your own self
Hereafter, when you yield your flower of life
To one more fitly yours, not thrice your age:
And then will I, for true you are and sweet

Beyond mine old belief in womanhood,
More specially should your good knight be poor,
Endow you with broad land and territory
Even to the half my realm beyond the seas,
So that would make you happy: furthermore,
Ev'n to the death, as tho' you were my blood,
In all your quarrels will I be your knight.
This will I do, dear damsel, for your sake,
And more than this I cannot.'

While he spoke
She neither blush'd nor shook, but deathly-pale
Stood grasping what was nearest, then replied:
'Of all this will I nothing'; and so fell,
And thus they bore her swooning to her tower.
Then spake, to whom thro' those black walls of yew
Their talk had pierced, her father: 'Ay, a flash,
I fear me, that will strike my blossom dead.
Too courteous are ye, fair Lord Lancelot.
I pray you, use some rough discourtesy
To blunt or break her passion.'

Lancelot said,
'That were against me: what I can I will';
And there that day remain'd, and toward even
Sent for his shield: full meekly rose the maid,
Stript off the case, and gave the naked shield;
Then, when she heard his horse upon the stones,
Unclasping flung the casement back, and look'd
Down on his helm, from which her sleeve had gone.
And Lancelot knew the little clinking sound,
And she by tact of love was well aware
That Lancelot knew that she was looking at him.
And yet he glanced not up, nor waved his hand,
Nor bad farewell, but sadly rode away.
This was the one discourtesy that he used.

So in her tower alone the maiden sat:
His very shield was gone; only the case,
Her own poor work, her empty labour, left.
But still she heard him, still his picture form'd

And grew between her and the pictured wall.
Then came her father, saying in low tones,
'Have comfort,' whom she greeted quietly.
Then came her brethren saying, 'Peace to thee,
Sweet sister,' whom she answer'd with all calm.
But when they left her to herself again,
Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field
Approaching thro' the darkness, call'd; the owls
Wailing had power upon her, and she mixt
Her fancies with the sallow-rifted glooms
Of evening, and the moanings of the wind.

And in those days she made a little song,
And call'd her song 'The Song of Love and Death.'
And sang it: sweetly could she make and sing.

'Sweet is true love tho' given in vain, in vain;
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain:
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

'Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be:
Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me.
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

'Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

'I fain would follow love, if that could be;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me;
Call and I follow, I follow! let me die.'

High with the last line scaled her voice, and this,
All in a fiery dawning wild with wind
That shook her tower, the brothers heard, and thought
With shuddering, 'Hark the Phantom of the house
That ever shrieks before a death,' and call'd
The father, and all three in hurry and fear
Ran to her, and lo! the blood-red light of dawn
Flared on her face, she shrilling, 'Let me die!'

As when we dwell upon a word we know,
Repeating, till the word we know so well
Becomes a wonder, and we know not why,
So dwelt the father on her face, and thought
'Is this Elaine?' till back the maiden fell,
Then gave a languid hand to each, and lay,
Speaking a still good-morrow with her eyes.
At last she said, 'Sweet brothers, yesternight
I seem'd a curious little maid again,
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,
And when you used to take me with the flood
Up the great river in the boatman's boat.
Only you would not pass beyond the cape
That has the poplar on it: there you fixt
Your limit, oft returning with the tide.
And yet I cried because you would not pass
Beyond it, and far up the shining flood
Until we found the palace of the King.
And yet you would not; but this night I dream'd
That I was all alone upon the flood,
And then I said, "Now shall I have my will":
And there I woke, but still the wish remain'd.
So let me hence that I may pass at last
Beyond the poplar and far up the flood,
Until I find the palace of the King.
There will I enter in among them all,
And no man there will dare to mock at me;
But there the fine Gawain will wonder at me,
And there the great Sir Lancelot muse at me;
Gawain, who bad a thousand farewells to me,
Lancelot, who coldly went, nor bad me one:
And there the King will know me and my love,
And there the Queen herself will pity me,
And all the gentle court will welcome me,
And after my long voyage I shall rest!'

'Peace,' said her father, 'O my child, you seem
Light-headed, for what force is yours to go
So far, being sick? and wherefore would you look
On this proud fellow again, who scorns us all?'

Then the rough Torre began to heave and move;
And bluster into stormy sobs and say,
'I never loved him: an I meet with him,
I care not howsoever great he be,
Then will I strike at him and strike him down;
Give me good fortune, I will strike him dead,
For this discomfort he hath done the house.'

To whom the gentle sister made reply,
'Fret not yourself, dear brother, nor be wroth,
Seeing it is no more Sir Lancelot's fault
Not to love me, than it is mine to love
Him of all men who seems to me the highest.'

'Highest?' the father answer'd, echoing 'highest?'
(He meant to break the passion in her) 'nay,
Daughter, I know not what you call the highest;
But this I know, for all the people know it,
He loves the Queen, and in an open shame:
And she returns his love in open shame;
If this be high, what is it to be low?'

Then spake the lily maid of Astolat:
'Sweet father, all too faint and sick am I
For anger: these are slanders: never yet
Was noble man but made ignoble talk.
He makes no friend who never made a foe.
But now it is my glory to have loved
One peerless, without stain: so let me pass,
My father, howsoe'er I seem to you,
Not all unhappy, having loved God's best
And greatest, tho' my love had no return:
Yet, seeing you desire your child to live,
Thanks, but you work against your own desire;
For if I could believe the things you say
I should but die the sooner; wherefore cease,
Sweet father, and bid call the ghostly man
Hither, and let me shrive me clean, and die.'

So when the ghostly man had come and gone,
She with a face, bright as for sin forgiven,

Besought Lavaine to write as she devised
A letter, word for word; and when he ask'd,
'Is it for Lancelot, is it for my dear lord?
Then will I bear it gladly'; she replied,
'For Lancelot and the Queen and all the world,
But I myself must bear it.' Then he wrote
The letter she devised; which being writ
And folded, 'O sweet father, tender and true,
Deny me not,' she said—'ye never yet
Denied my fancies—this, however strange,
My latest: lay the letter in my hand
A little ere I die, and close the hand
Upon it; I shall guard it even in death.
And when the heat is gone from out my heart,
Then take the little bed on which I died
For Lancelot's love, and deck it like the Queen's
For richness, and me also like the Queen
In all I have of rich, and lay me on it.
And let there be prepared a chariot-bier
To take me to the river, and a barge
Be ready on the river, clothed in black.
I go in state to court, to meet the Queen.
There surely I shall speak for mine own self,
And none of you can speak for me so well.
And therefore let our dumb old man alone
Go with me, he can steer and row, and he
Will guide me to that palace, to the doors.'

She ceased: her father promised; whereupon
She grew so cheerful that they deem'd her death
Was rather in the fantasy than the blood.
But ten slow mornings past, and on the eleventh
Her father laid the letter in her hand,
And closed the hand upon it, and she died.
So that day there was dole in Astolat.

But when the next sun brake from underground,
Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows
Accompanying, the sad chariot-bier
Past like a shadow thro' the field, that shone
Full-summer, to that stream whereon the barge,

Pall'd all its length in blackest samite, lay,
There sat the lifelong creature of the house,
Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,
Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.
So those two brethren from the chariot took
And on the black decks laid her in her bed,
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung
The silken case with braided blazonings,
And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her
'Sister, farewell for ever,' and again
'Farewell, sweet sister,' parted all in tears.
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead,
Steer'd by the dumb, went upward with the flood—
In her right hand the lily, in her left
The letter—all her bright hair streaming down—
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white
All but her face, and that clear-featured face
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,
But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.

That day Sir Lancelot at the palace craved
Audience of Guinevere, to give at last
The price of half a realm, his costly gift,
Hard-won and hardly won with bruise and blow,
With deaths of others, and almost his own,
The nine-years-fought-for diamonds: for he saw
One of her house, and sent him to the Queen
Bearing his wish, whereto the Queen agreed
With such and so unmoved a majesty
She might have seem'd her statue, but that he,
Low-drooping till he wellnigh kiss'd her feet
For loyal awe, saw with a sidelong eye
The shadow of some piece of pointed lace,
In the Queen's shadow, vibrate on the walls,
And parted, laughing in his courtly heart.

All in an oriel on the summer side,
Vine-clad, of Arthur's palace toward the stream,
They met, and Lancelot kneeling utter'd, 'Queen,
Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,

Take, what I had not won except for you,
These jewels, and make me happy, making them
An armlet for the roundest arm on earth,
Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's
Is tawnier than her cygnet's : these are words :
Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin
In speaking, yet O grant my worship of it
Words, as we grant grief tears. Such sin in words
Perchance, we both can pardon : but, my Queen,
I hear of rumours flying thro' your court.
Our bond, as not the bond of man and wife,
Should have in it an absoluter trust
To make up that defect : let rumours be :
When did not rumours fly ? these, as I trust
That you trust me in your own nobleness,
I may not well believe that you believe.'

While thus he spoke, half turn'd away, the Queen
Brake from the vast oriel-embowering vine
Leaf after leaf, and tore, and cast them off,
Till all the place whereon she stood was green ;
Then, when he ceased, in one cold passive hand
Received at once and laid aside the gems
There on a table near her, and replied :

' It may be I am quicker of belief
Than you believe me, Lancelot of the Lake.
Our bond is not the bond of man and wife.
This good is in it, whatsoe'er of ill,
It can be broken easier. I for you
This many a year have done despite and wrong
To one whom ever in my heart of hearts
I did acknowledge nobler. What are these ?
Diamonds for me ! they had been thrice their worth
Being your gift, had you not lost your own.
To loyal hearts the value of all gifts
Must vary as the giver's. Not for me !
For her ! for your new fancy. Only this
Grant me, I pray you : have your joys apart.
I doubt not that however changed, you keep
So much of what is graceful : and myself
Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy

In which as Arthur's Queen I move and rule :
So cannot speak my mind. An end to this !
A strange one ! yet I take it with Amen.
So pray you, add my diamonds to her pearls ;
Deck her with these ; tell her, she shines me down :
An armlet for an arm to which the Queen's
Is haggard, or a necklace for a neck
O as much fairer—as a faith once fair
Was richer than these diamonds—hers not mine—
Nay, by the mother of our Lord himself,
Or hers or mine, mine now to work my will—
She shall not have them.'

Saying which she seized,
And, thro' the casement standing wide for heat,
Flung them, and down they flash'd, and smote the
stream.

Then from the smitten surface flash'd, as it were,
Diamonds to meet them, and they past away.
Then while Sir Lancelot leant, in half disgust
At love, life, all things, on the window ledge,
Close underneath his eyes, and right across
Where these had fallen, slowly past the barge
Whereon the lily maid of Astolat
Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night.

But the wild Queen, who saw not, burst away
To weep and wail in secret ; and the barge,
On to the palace-doorway sliding, paused.
There two stood arm'd, and kept the door ; to whom,
All up the marble stair, tier over tier,
Were added mouths that gaped, and eyes that ask'd
'What is it?' but that oarsman's haggard face,
As hard and still as is the face that men
Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks
On some cliff-side, appall'd them, and they said,
'He is enchanted, cannot speak—and she,
Look how she sleeps—the Fairy Queen, so fair !
Yea, but how pale ! what are they ? flesh and blood ?
Or come to take the King to fairyland ?
For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,
But that he passes into fairyland.'

While thus they babbled of the King, the King
Came girt with knights: then turn'd the tongueless
man

From the half-face to the full eye, and rose
And pointed to the damsel, and the doors.
So Arthur bad the meek Sir Percivale
And pure Sir Galahad to uplift the maid;
And reverently they bore her into hall.
Then came the fine Gawain and wonder'd at her,
And Lancelot later came and mused at her,
And last the Queen herself, and pitied her:
But Arthur spied the letter in her hand,
Stoopt, took, brake seal, and read it; this was all:

'Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat,
Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
I loved you, and my love had no return,
And therefore my true love has been my death.
And therefore to our Lady Guinevere,
And to all other ladies, I make moan.
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.
Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,
As thou art a knight peerless.'

Thus he read:

And ever in the reading, lords and dames
Wept, looking often from his face who read
To hers which lay so silent, and at times,
So touch'd were they, half-thinking that her lips,
Who had devised the letter, moved again.

Then freely spoke Sir Lancelot to them all:
'My lord liege Arthur, and all ye that hear,
Know that for this most gentle maiden's death
Right heavy am I; for good she was and true,
But loved me with a love beyond all love
In women, whomsoever I have known.
Yet to be loved makes not to love again;
Not at my years, however it hold in youth.
I swear by truth and knighthood that I gave
No cause, not willingly, for such a love:

To this I call my friends in testimony,
Her brethren, and her father, who himself
Besought me to be plain and blunt, and use,
To break her passion, some discourtesy
Against my nature: what I could, I did.
I left her and I bad her no farewell;
Tho', had I dreamt the damsel would have died,
I might have put my wits to some rough use,
And help'd her from herself.'

Then said the Queen
(Sea was her wrath, yet working after storm)
'You might at least have done her so much grace,
Fair lord, as would have help'd her from her death.'
He raised his head, their eyes met and hers fell,
He adding,

'Queen, she would not be content
Save that I wedded her, which could not be.
Then might she follow me thro' the world, she ask'd;
It could not be. I told her that her love
Was but the flash of youth, would darken down
To rise hereafter in a stiller flame
Toward one more worthy of her—then would I,
More specially were he, she wedded, poor,
Estate them with large land and territory
In mine own realm beyond the narrow seas,
To keep them in all joyance: more than this
I could not; this she would not, and she died.'

He pausing, Arthur answer'd, 'O my knight,
It will be to thy worship, as my knight,
And mine, as head of all our Table Round,
To see that she be buried worshipfully.'

So toward that shrine which then in all the realm
Was richest, Arthur leading, slowly went
The marshall'd Order of their Table Round,
And Lancelot sad beyond his wont, to see
The maiden buried, not as one unknown,
Nor meanly, but with gorgeous obsequies,
And mass, and rolling music, like a queen.

And when the knights had laid her comely head
Low in the dust of half-forgotten kings,
Then Arthur spake among them, 'Let her tomb
Be costly, and her image thereupon,
And let the shield of Lancelot at her feet
Be carven, and her lily in her hand,
And let the story of her dolorous voyage
For all true hearts be blazon'd on her tomb
In letters gold and azure!' which was wrought
Thereafter; but when now the lords and dames
And people, from the high door streaming, brake
Disorderly, as homeward each, the Queen,
Who mark'd Sir Lancelot where he moved apart,
Drew near, and sigh'd in passing, 'Lancelot,
Forgive me; mine was jealousy in love.'
He answer'd with his eyes upon the ground,
'That is love's curse; pass on, my Queen, forgiven.'
But Arthur, who beheld his cloudy brows,
Approach'd him, and with full affection flung
One arm about his neck, and spake and said:

'Lancelot, my Lancelot, thou in whom I have
Most joy and most affiance, for I know
What thou hast been in battle by my side,
And many a time have watch'd thee at the tilt
Strike down the lusty and long practised knight,
And let the younger and unskill'd go by
To win his honour and to make his name,
And loved thy courtesies and thee, a man
Made to be loved;—but now I would to God,
For the wild people say wild things of thee,
Thou couldst have loved this maiden, shaped, it seems,
By God for thee alone, and from her face,
If one may judge the living by the dead,
Delicately pure and marvellously fair,
Who might have brought thee, now a lonely man
Wifeless and heirless, noble issue, sons
Born to the glory of thy name and fame,
My knight, the great Sir Lancelot of the Lake.'

Then answer'd Lancelot, 'Fair she was, my King,
Pure, as you ever wish your knights to be.

To doubt her fairness were to want an eye,
To doubt her pureness were to want a heart—
Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love
Could bind him, but free love will not be bound.'

'Free love, so bound, were freest,' said the King.
'Let love be free; free love is for the best:
And, after heaven, on our dull side of death,
What should be best, if not so pure a love
Clothed in so pure a loveliness? yet thee
She fail'd to bind, tho' being, as I think,
Unbound as yet, and gentle, as I know.'

And Lancelot answer'd nothing, but he went,
And at the inrunning of a little brook
Sat by the river in a cove, and watch'd
The high reed wave, and lifted up his eyes
And saw the barge that brought her moving down,
Far-off, a blot upon the stream, and said
Low in himself, 'Ah simple heart and sweet,
You loved me, damsel, surely with a love
Far tenderer than my Queen's. Pray for thy soul?
Ay, that will I. Farewell too—now at last—
Farewell, fair lily. "Jealousy in love"?
Not rather dead love's harsh heir, jealous pride?
Queen, if I grant the jealousy as of love,
May not your crescent fear for name and fame
Speak, as it waxes, of a love that wanes?
Why did the King dwell on my name to me?
Mine own name shames me, seeming a reproach,
Lancelot, whom the Lady, of the Lake
Stole from his mother—as the story runs—
She chanted snatches of mysterious song
Heard on the winding waters, eve and morn
She kiss'd me saying, "Thou art fair, my child,
As a king's son," and often in her arms
She bare me, pacing on the dusky mere.
Would she had drowned me in it, where'er it be!
For what am I? what profits me my name
Of greatest knight? I fought for it, and have it:
Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;

Now grown a part of me: but what use in it?
 To make men worse by making my sin known?
 Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great?
 Alas for Arthur's greatest knight, a man
 Not 'after Arthur's heart! I needs must break
 These bonds that so defame me: not without
 She wills it: would I, if she will'd it? nay,
 Who knows? but if I would not, then may God,
 I pray him, send a sudden Angel down
 To seize me by the hair and bear me far,
 And fling me deep in that forgotten mere,
 Among the tumbled fragments of the hills.'

So groan'd Sir Lancelot in remorseful pain
 Not knowing he should die a holy man.

II. GUINEVERE.

Couchant, lying, crouching—term used in heraldry (as also **rampant**);
 Lords of the **White Horse**: the standard of the Saxons was a white
 horse, as the dragon of the Britons, or of their leader—hence Pen-
 dragon, leader in war, of which the dragon is the symbol: note that
 Hengst means horse, as also Horsa; **weald**, hill or forest; **Bos**, Bos-(or
 Botolph's)-castle, in Cornwall; **Dundagil**, Tintagil; **scathe**, harm;
Usk, in S. Wales; **defeat** of fame, failure or loss of reputation;
vall, lower; **dole**, alms.

QUEEN GUINEVERE had fled the court, and sat
 There in the holy house at Almesbury
 Weeping, none with her save a little maid,
 A novice: one low light betwixt them burn'd
 Blurr'd by the creeping mist, for all abroad,
 Beneath a moon unseen albeit at full,
 The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face,
 Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still.

For hither had she fled, her cause of flight
 Sir Modred; he the nearest to the King
 His nephew, ever like a subtle beast
 Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne,
 Ready to spring, waiting a chance: for this

He chill'd the popular praises of the King
With silent smiles of slow disparagement;
And tamper'd with the Lords of the White Horse,
Heathen, the brood by Hengist left; and sought
To make disruption in the Table Round
Of Arthur, and to splinter it into feuds
Serving his traitorous end; and all his aims
Were sharpen'd by strong hate for Lancelot.

For thus it chanced one morn when all the court,
Green-suited, but with plumes that mock'd the may,
Had been, their wont, a-maying and return'd,
That Modred still in green, all ear and eye,
Climb'd to the high top of the garden-wall
To spy some secret scandal if he might,
And saw the Queen who sat betwixt her best
Enid, and lissome Vivien, of her court
The wildest and the worst; and more than this
He saw not, for Sir Lancelot passing by
Spied where he couch'd, and as the gardener's hand
Picks from the colewort a green caterpillar,
So from the high wall and the flowering grove
Of grasses Lancelot pluck'd him by the heel,
And cast him as a worm upon the way;
But when he knew the Prince tho' marr'd with dust,
He, reverencing king's blood in a bad man,
Made such excuses as he might, and these
Full knightly without scorn; for in those days
No knight of Arthur's noblest dealt in scorn;
But, if a man were halt or hunch'd, in him
By those whom God had made full-limb'd and tall,
Scorn was allow'd as part of his defect,
And he was answer'd softly by the King
And all his Table. So Lancelot help
To raise the Prince, who rising twice or thrice
Full sharply smote his knees, and smiled, and went:
But, ever after, the small violence done
Rankled in him and ruffled all his heart,
As the sharp wind that ruffles all day long
A little bitter pool about a stone
On the bare coast.

But when Sir Lancelot told
This matter to the Queen, at first she laugh'd
Lightly, to think of Modred's dusty fall,
Then shudder'd, as the village wife who cries
' I shudder, some one steps across my grave ' ;
Then laugh'd again, but faintlier, for indeed
She half-foresaw that he, the subtle beast,
Would track her guilt until he found, and hers
Would be for evermore a name of scorn.
Henceforward rarely could she front in hall,
Or elsewhere, Modred's narrow foxy face,
Heart-hiding smile, and gray persistent eye :
Henceforward too, the Powers that tend the soul,
To help it from the death that cannot die,
And save it even in extremes began
To vex and plague her. Many a time for hours,
Beside the placid breathings of the King,
In the dead night, grim faces came and went
Before her, or a vague spiritual fear—
Like to some doubtful noise of creaking doors,
Heard by the watcher in a haunted house,
That keeps the rust of murder on the walls—
Held her awake : or if she slept, she dream'd
An awful dream ; for then she seem'd to, stand
On some vast plain before a setting sun,
And from the sun there swiftly made at her
A ghastly something, and its shadow flew
Before it, till it touch'd her, and she turn'd—
When lo ! her own, that broadening from her feet,
And blackening, swallow'd all the land, and in it
Far cities burnt, and with a cry she woke.
And all this trouble did not pass but grew ;
Till ev'n the clear face of the guileless King,
And trustful courtesies of household life,
Became her bane ; and at the last she said,
' O Lancelot, get thee hence to thine own land,
For if thou tarry we shall meet again,
And if we meet again, some evil chance
Will make the smouldering scandal break and blaze
Before the people, and our lord the King.'
And Lancelot ever promised, but remain'd,

And still they met and met. Again she said,
' O Lancelot, if thou love me get thee hence.'
And then they were agreed upon a night
(When the good King should not be there) to meet
And part for ever. Passion-pale they met
And greeted: hands in hands, and eye to eye,
Low on the border of her couch they sat
Stammering and staring: it was their last hour,
A madness of farewells. And Modred brought
His creatures to the basement of the tower
For testimony; and crying with full voice
' Traitor, come out, ye are trapt at last,' aroused
Lancelot, who rushing outward lionlike
Leapt on him, and hurl'd him headlong, and he fell
Stunn'd, and his creatures took and bare him off,
And all was still: then she, ' The end is come,
And I am shamed for ever'; and he said,
' Mine be the shame; mine was the sin: but rise,
And fly to my strong castle overseas:
There will I hide thee, till my life shall end,
There hold thee with my life against the world.'
She answer'd, ' Lancelot, wilt thou hold me so?
Nay, friend, for we have taken our farewells.
Would God that thou couldst hide me from myself!
Mine is the shame, for I was wife, and thou
Unwedded: yet rise now, and let us fly,
For I will draw me into sanctuary,
And bide my doom.' So Lancelot got her horse,
Set her thereon, and mounted on his own,
And then they rode to the divided way,
There kiss'd, and parted weeping: for he past,
Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen,
Back to his land; but she to Almesbury
Fled all night long by glimmering waste and weald,
And heard the Spirits of the waste and weald
Moan as she fled, or thought she heard them moan:
And in herself she moan'd ' Too late, too late!'
Till in the cold wind that foreruns the morn,
A blot in heaven, the Raven, flying high,
Croak'd, and she thought, ' He spies a field of death;
For now the heathen of the Northern Sea,

Lured by the crimes and frailties of the court,
Begin to slay the folk, and spoil the land.'

And when she came to Almesbury she spake
Therè to the nuns, and said, ' Mine enemies
Pursue me, but, O peaceful sisterhood,
Receive, and yield me sanctuary, nor ask
Her name to whom ye yield it, till her time
To tell you ' ; and her beauty, grace and power,
Wrought as a charm upon them, and they spared
To ask it.

So the stately Queen abode
For many a week, unknown, among the nuns ;
Nor with them mix'd, nor told her name, nor sought,
Wrapt in her grief, for housel or for shrift,
But communed only with the little maid,
Who pleased her with a babbling heedlessness
Which often lured her from herself ; but now,
This night, a rumour wildly blown about
Came, that Sir Modred had usurp'd the realm,
And leagued him with the heathen, while the King
Was waging war on Lancelot : then she thought,
' With what a hate the people and the King
Must hate me,' and bow'd down upon her hands
Silent, until the little maid, who brook'd
No silence, brake it, uttering ' Late, so late !
What hour, I wonder, now ? ' and when she drew
No answer, by and by began to hum
An air the nuns had taught her ; ' Late, so late ! '
Which when she heard, the Queen look'd up, and said,
' O maiden, if indeed ye list to sing,
Sing, and unbind my heart that I may weep.'
Whereat full willingly sang the little maid.

' Late, late, so late ! and dark the night and chill !
Late, late, so late ! but we can enter still.
Too late, too late ! ye cannot enter now.

' No light had we : for that we do repent ;
And learning this, the bridegroom will relent.
Too late, too late ! ye cannot enter now.

'No light: so late! and dark and chill the night!
O let us in, that we may find the light!
Too late, too late: ye cannot enter now.'

'Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet?
O let us in, tho' late, to kiss his feet!
No, no, too late! ye cannot enter now.'

So sang the novice, while full passionately,
Her head upon her hands, remembering
Her thought when first she came, wept the sad Queen.
Then said the little novice prattling to her,

'O pray you, noble lady, weep no more;
But let my words, the words of one so small,
Who knowing nothing knows but to obey—
And if I do not there is penance given—
Comfort your sorrows; for they do not flow
From evil done; right sure am I of that,
Who see your tender grace and stateliness.
But weigh your sorrows with our lord the King's,
And weighing find them less; for gone is he
To wage grim war against Sir Lancelot there,
Round that strong castle where he holds the Queen:
And Modred whom he left in charge of all,
The traitor—Ah sweet lady, the King's grief
For his own self, and his own Queen, and realm,
Must needs be thrice as great as any of ours.
For me, I thank the saints, I am not great.
For if there ever come a grief to me
I cry my cry in silence, and have done.
None knows it, and my tears have brought me good:
But even were the griefs of little ones
As great as those of great ones, yet this grief
Is added to the griefs the great must bear,
That howsoever much they may desire
Silence, they cannot weep behind a cloud:
As even here they talk at Almesbury
About the good King and his wicked Queen,
And were I such a King with such a Queen,
Well might I wish to veil her wickedness,
But were I such a King, it could not be.'

Then to her own sad heart mutter'd the Queen,
'Will the child kill me with her innocent talk?'
But openly she answer'd, 'Must not I,
If this false traitor have displaced his lord,
Grieve with the common grief of all the realm?'

'Yea,' said the maid, 'this is all woman's grief,
That *she* is woman, whose disloyal life
Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round
Which good King Arthur founded, years ago,
With signs and miracles and wonders, there
At Camelot, ere the coming of the Queen.'

Then thought the Queen within herself again,
'Will the child kill me with her foolish prate?'
But openly she spake and said to her,
'O little maid, shut in by nunnery walls,
What canst thou know of Kings and Tables Round,
Or what of signs and wonders, but the signs
And simple miracles of thy nunnery?'

To whom the little novice garrulously,
'Yea, but I know: the land was full of signs
And wonders ere the coming of the Queen.
So said my father, and himself was knight
Of the great Table—at the founding of it;
And rode thereto from Lyonesse, and he said
That as he rode, an hour or maybe twain
After the sunset, down the coast, he heard
Strange music, and he paused, and turning—there,
All down the lonely coast of Lyonesse,
Each with a beacon-star upon his head,
And with a wild sea-light about his feet,
He saw them—headland after headland flame
Far on into the rich heart of the west:
And in the light the white mermaiden swam,
And strong man-breasted things stood from the sea,
And sent a deep sea-voice thro' all the land,
To which the little elves of chasm and cleft
Made answer, sounding like a distant horn
So said my father—yea, and furthermore,

Next morning, while he past the dim-lit woods,
Himself beheld three spirits mad with joy
Come dashing down on a tall wayside flower,
That shook beneath them, as the thistle shakes
When three gray linnets wrangle for the seed :
And still at evenings on before his horse
The flickering fairy-circle wheel'd and broke
Flying, and link'd again, and wheel'd and broke
Flying, for all the land was full of life.
And when at last he came to Camelot,
A wreath of airy dancers hand-in-hand
Swung round the lighted lantern of the hall;
And in the hall itself was such a feast
As never man had dream'd; for every knight
Had whatsoever meat he long'd for served
By hands unseen; and even, as he said,
Down in the cellars merry bloated things
Shoulder'd the spigot, straddling on the butts
While the wine ran : so glad were spirits and men
Before the coming of the sinful Queen.'

Then spake the Queen and somewhat bitterly,
' Were they so glad? ill prophets were they all,
Spirits and men : could none of them foresee,
Not even thy wise father with his signs
And wonders, what has fall'n upon the realm? '

To whom the novice garrulously again,
' Yea, one, a bard; of whom my father said,
Full many a noble war-song had he sung,
Ev'n in the presence of an enemy's fleet,
Between the steep cliff and the coming wave;
And many a mystic lay of life and death
Had chanted on the smoky mountain-tops,
When round him bent the spirits of the hills
With all their dewy hair blown back like flame :
So said my father—and that night the bard
Sang Arthur's glorious wars, and sang the King
As wellnigh more than man, and rail'd at those
Who call'd him the false son of Gorlois :
For there was no man knew from whence he came;

But after tempest, when the long wave broke
All down the thundering shores of Bude and Bos,
There came a day as still as heaven, and then
They found a naked child upon the sands
Of wild Dundagil by the Cornish sea;
And that was Arthur; and they foster'd him
Till he by miracle was approven King:
And that his grave should be a mystery
From all men, like his birth; and could he find
A woman in her womanhood as great
As he was in his manhood, then, he sang
The twain together well might change the world.
But even in the middle of his song
He falter'd and his hand fell from the harp,
And pale he turned, and reel'd, and would have fall'n,
But that they stay'd him up; nor would he tell
His vision; but what doubt that he foresaw
This evil work of Lancelot and the Queen?'

Then thought the Queen, 'Lo! they have set her on,
Our simple-seeming Abbess and her nuns,
To play upon me,' and bow'd her head nor spake.
Whereat the novice crying, with clasp'd hands,
Shame on her own garrulity garrulously,
Said the good nuns would check her gadding tongue
Full often, 'and, sweet lady, if I seem
To vex an ear too sad to listen to me,
Unmannerly, with prattling and the tales
Which my good father told me, check me too:
Nor let me shame my father's memory, one
Of noblest manners, tho' himself would say
Sir Lancelot had the noblest; and he died,
Kill'd in a tilt, come next, five summers back,
And left me; but of others who remain,
And of the two first-famed for courtesy—
And pray you check me if I ask amiss—
But pray you, which had noblest, while you moved
Among them, Lancelot or our lord the King?'

Then the pale Queen look'd up and answer'd her,
'Sir Lancelot, as became a noble knight,

Was gracious to all ladies, and the same
In open battle or the tilting-field
Forbore his own advantage, and the King
In open battle or the tilting-field
Forbore his own advantage, and these two
Were the most nobly-manner'd men of all;
For manners are not idle, but the fruit
Of loyal nature, and of noble mind.'

'Yea,' said the maid, 'be manners such fair fruit?
Then Lancelot's needs must be a thousand-fold
Less noble, being, as all rumour runs,
The most disloyal friend in all the world.'
To which a mournful answer made the Queen:
'O closed about by narrowing nunnery-walls,
What knowest thou of the world, and all its lights
And shadows, all the wealth and all the woe?
If ever Lancelot, that most noble knight,
Were for one hour less noble than himself,
Pray for him that he scape the doom of fire,
And weep for her who drew him to his doom.'

'Yea,' said the little novice, 'I pray for both;
But I should all as soon believe that his,
Sir Lancelot's, were as noble as the King's,
As I could think, sweet lady, yours would be
Such as they are, were you the sinful Queen.'

So she, like many another babbler, hurt
Whom she would soothe, and harm'd where she would
heal;
For here a sudden flush of wrathful heat
Fired all the pale face of the Queen, who cried,
'Such as thou art be never maiden more
For ever! thou their tool, set on to plague
And play upon, and harry me, petty spy
And traitress.' When that storm of anger brake
From Guinevere, aghast the maiden rose,
White as her veil, and stood before the Queen
As tremulously as foam upon the beach
Stands in a wind, ready to break and fly,

And when the Queen had added 'Get thee hence,'
Fled frightened. Then that other left alone
Sigh'd, and began to gather heart again,
Saying in herself, 'The simple, fearful child
Meant nothing, but my own too-fearful guilt,
Simpler than any child, betrays itself.
But help me, heaven, for surely I repent.
For what is true repentance but in thought—
Not ev'n in inmost thought to think again
The sins that made the past so pleasant to us :
And I have sworn never to see him more,
To see him more.'

And ev'n in saying this,
Her memory from old habit of the mind
Went slipping back upon the golden days
In which she saw him first, when Lancelot came,
Reputed the best knight and goodliest man,
Ambassador, to lead her to his lord
Arthur, and led her forth, and far ahead
Of his and her retinue moving, they,
Rapt in sweet talk or lively, all on love
And sport and tilts and pleasure, (for the time
Was maytime, and as yet no sin was dream'd,)
Rode under groves that look'd a paradise
Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth
That seem'd the heavens upbreking thro' the earth,
And on from hill to hill, and every day
Beheld at noon in some delicious dale
The silk pavilions of King Arthur raised
For brief repast or afternoon repose
By courier gone before; and on again,
Till yet once more ere set of sun they saw
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship,
That crown'd the state pavilion of the King,
Blaze by the rushing brook or silent well.

But when the Queen, immersed in such a trance,
And moving thro' the past unconsciously,
Came to that point where first she saw the King
Ride toward her from the city, sigh'd to find

Her journey done, glanced at him, thought him cold,
High, self-contain'd, and passionless, not like him,
'Not like my Lancelot'—while she brooded thus
And grew half-guilty in her thoughts again,
There rode an armed warrior to the doors.
A murmuring whisper thro' the nunnery ran,
Then on a sudden a cry, 'The King.' She sat
Stiff-stricken, listening; but when armed feet
Thro' the long gallery from the outer doors
Rang coming, prone from off her seat she fell,
And grovell'd with her face against the floor:
There with her milk-white arms and shadowy hair
She made her face a darkness from the King:
And in the darkness heard his armed feet
Pause by her; then came silence, then a voice,
Monotonous and hollow like a Ghost's
Denouncing judgment, but tho' changed the King's:

'Liest thou here so low, the child of one
I honour'd, happy, dead before thy shame?
Well is it that no child is born of thee.
The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,
The craft of kindred and the Godless hosts
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea;
Whom I, while yet Sir Lancelot, my right arm,
The mightiest of my knights, abode with me,
Have everywhere about this land of Christ
In twelve great battles ruining overthrown.
And knowest thou now from whence I come?—from
him,
From waging bitter war with him: and he,
That did not shun to smite me in worse way,
Had yet that grace of courtesy in him left,
He spared to lift his hand against the King
Who made him knight: but many a knight was slain;
And many more, and all his kith and kin
Clave to him, and abode in his own land.
And many more when Modred raised revolt,
Forgetful of their troth and fealty, clave
To Modred, and a remnant stays with me.

And of this remnant will I leave a part,
True men who love me still, for whom I live,
To guard thee in the wild hour coming on,
Lest but a hair of this low head be harm'd.
Fear not : thou shalt be guarded till my death.
Howbeit I know, if ancient prophecies
Have err'd not, that I march to meet my doom.
Thou hast not made my life so sweet to me,
That I the King should greatly care to live ;
For thou hast spoilt the purpose of my life.
Bear with me for the last time while I show,
Ev'n for thy sake, the sin which thou hast sinn'd.
For when the Roman left us, and their law
Relax'd its hold upon us, and the ways
Were fill'd with rapine, here and there a deed
Of prowess done redress'd a random wrong.
But I was first of all the kings who drew
The knighthood-errant of this realm and all
The realms together under me, their Head,
In that fair Order of my Table Round,
A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as model for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginning of a time.
I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her ; for indeed I knew
Of no more subtle master under heaven
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
Not only to keep down the base in man,
But teach high thought, and amiable words
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.
And all this throve before I wedded thee !
Believing, " Lo mine helpmate, one to feel

My purpose and rejoicing in my joy."
Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot;
Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt;
Then others, following these my mightiest knights,
And drawing foul ensample from fair names,
Sinn'd also, till the loathsome opposite
Of all my heart had destined did obtain,
And all thro' thee! so that this life of mine
I guard as God's high gift from scathe and wrong,
Not greatly care to lose: but rather think
How sad it were for Arthur, should he live,
To sit once more within his lonely hall,
And miss the wonted number of my knights,
And miss to hear high talk of noble deeds
As in the golden days before thy sin.
For which of us, who might be left, could speak
Of the pure heart, nor seem to glance at thee?
And in thy bowers of Camelot or of Usk
Thy shadow still would glide from room to room,
And I should evermore be vexed with thee
In hanging robe or vacant ornament,
Or ghostly footfall echoing on the stair.
For think not, tho' thou wouldst not love thy lord,
Thy lord has wholly lost his love for thee.
I am not made of so slight elements.
Yet must I leave thee, woman, to thy shame.
I hold that man the worst of public foes
Who either for his own or children's sake,
To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife
Whom he knows false, abide and rule the house:
For being thro' his cowardice allow'd
Her station, taken everywhere for pure,
She like a new disease, unknown to men,
Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd,
Makes wicked lightnings of her eyes, and saps
The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse
With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young.
Worst of the worst, were that man he that reigns!
Better the King's waste hearth and aching heart
Than thou reseated in thy place of light,
The mockery of my people, and their bane.'

He paused, and in the pause she crept an inch
Nearer, and laid her hands about his feet.
Far off a solitary trumpet blew.
Then waiting by the doors the warhorse neigh'd
As at a friend's voice, and he spake again :

‘ Yet think not that I come to urge thy crimes,
I did not come to curse thee, Guinevere,
I, whose vast pity almost makes me die
To see thee, laying there thy golden head,
My pride in happier summers, at my feet.
The wrath which forced my thoughts on that fierce
law,
The doom of treason and the flaming death,
(When first I learnt thee hidden here) is past.
The pang—which while I weigh'd thy heart with one
Too wholly true to dream untruth in thee,
Made my tears burn—is also past—in part.
And all is past, the sin is sinn'd, and I,
Lo! I forgive thee, as Eternal God
Forgives: do thou for thine own soul the rest.
But how to take last leave of all I loved?
O golden hair, with which I used to play
Not knowing! O imperial-moulded form,
And beauty such as never woman wore,
Until it came a kingdom's curse with thee—
I cannot touch thy lips; they are not mine,
But Lancelot's: nay, they never were the King's.
I cannot take thy hand; that too is flesh,
And in the flesh thou hast sinn'd; and mine own flesh,
Here looking down on thine polluted, cries
“ I loathe thee ”: yet not less, O Guinevere,
For I was ever virgin save for thee,
My love thro' flesh hath wrought into my life
So far, that my doom is, I love thee still.
Let no man dream but that I love thee still.
Perchance, and so thou purify thy soul,
And so thou lean on our fair father Christ,
Hereafter in that world where all are pure
We two may meet before high God, and thou
Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine, and know

I am thine husband—not a smaller soul,
Nor Lancelot, nor another. Leave me that,
I charge thee, my last hope. Now must I hence.
Thro' the thick night I hear the trumpet blow :
They summon me their King to lead mine hosts
Far down to that great battle in the west,
Where I must strike against my sister's son
Leagued with the lords of the White horse and knights
Once mine, and strike him dead, and meet myself
Death, or I know not what mysterious doom.
And thou remaining here wilt learn the event ;
But hither shall I never come again,
Never lie by thy side ; see thee no more—
Farewell ! '

And while she grovell'd at his feet,
She felt the King's breath wander o'er her neck,
And, in the darkness o'er her fallen head,
Perceived the waving of his hands that blest.

Then, listening till those armed steps were gone,
Rose the pale Queen, and in her anguish found
The casement : ' Peradventure,' so she thought,
' If I might see his face, and not be seen.'
And lo, he sat on horseback at the door !
And near him the sad nuns with each a light
Stood, and he gave them charge about the Queen,
To guard and foster her for evermore.
And while he spake to these his helm was lower'd,
To which for crest the golden dragon clung
Of Britain : so she did not see the face,
Which then was as an angel's, but she saw,
Wet with the mists and smitten by the lights,
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship
Blaze, making all the night a steam of fire.
And even then he turn'd ; and more and more
The moony vapour rolling round the King,
Who seem'd the phantom of a Giant in it,
Enwound him fold by fold, and made him gray
And grayer, till himself became as mist
Before her, moving ghostlike to his doom.

Then she stretch'd out her arms and cried aloud
'Oh Arthur!' there her voice brake suddenly,
Then—as a stream that spouting from a cliff
Falls in mid air, but gathering at the base
Re-makes itself, and flashes down the vale—
Went on in passionate utterance:

Gone—my lord!

Gone thro' my sin to slay and to be slain!
And he forgave me, and I could not speak.
Farewell? I should have answer'd his farewell.
His mercy choked me. . . Gone, my lord the King,
My own true lord! how dare I call him mine?
The shadow of another cleaves to me,
And makes me one pollution: he, the King,
Call'd me polluted: shall I kill myself?
What help in that? I cannot kill my sin,
If soul be soul; nor can I kill my shame;
No, nor by living can I live it down.
The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months,
The months will add themselves and make the years,
The years will roll into the centuries,
And mine will ever be a name of scorn.
I must not dwell on that defeat of fame.
Let the world be; that is but of the world.
What else? what hope? I think there was a hope,
Except he mock'd me when he spake of hope;
His hope he call'd it; but he never mocks,
For mockery is the fume of little hearts.
And blessed be the King, who hath forgiven
My wickedness to him, and left me hope
That in mine own heart I can live down sin
And be his mate hereafter in the heavens
Before high God. Ah great and gentle lord,
Who wast, as is the conscience of a saint
Among his warring senses, to thy knights—
To whom my false voluptuous pride, that took
Full easily all impressions from below,
Would not look up, or half-despised the height
To which I would not or I could not climb—
I thought I could not breathe in that fine air

That pure severity of perfect light—
I wanted warmth and colour which I found
In Lancelot—now I see thee what thou art,
Thou art the highest and most human too,
Not Lancelot, nor another. Is there none
Will tell the King I love him tho' so late?
Now—ere he goes to the great Battle? none :
Myself must tell him in that purer life,
But now it were too daring. Ah my God,
What might I not have made of thy fair world,
Had I but loved thy highest creature here?
It was my duty to have loved the highest :
It surely was my profit had I known :
It would have been my pleasure had I seen.
We needs must love the highest when we see it,
Not Lancelot, nor another.'

Here her hand
Grasp'd, made her vail her eyes : she look'd and saw
The novice, weeping, suppliant, and said to her,
' Yea, little maid, for am *I* not forgiven? '
Then glancing up beheld the holy nuns
All round her, weeping ; and her heart was loosed
Within her, and she wept with these and said,

' Ye know me then, that wicked one, who broke
The vast design and purpose of the King.
O shut me round with narrowing nunnery-walls,
Meek maidens, from the voices crying " Shame."
I must not scorn myself : he loves me still.
Let no one dream but that he loves me still.
So let me, if you do not shudder at me,
Nor shun to call me sister, dwell with you ;
Wear black and white, and be a nun like you ;
Fast with your fasts, not feasting with your feasts ;
Grieve with your griefs, not grieving at your joys,
But not rejoicing ; mingle with your rites ;
Pray and be pray'd for ; lie before your shrines ;
Do each low office of your holy house ;
Walk your dim cloister, and distribute dole
To poor sick people, richer in His eyes

Who ransom'd us, and haler too than I;
And treat their loathsome hurts and heal mine own;
And so wear out in almsdeed and in prayer
The sombre close of that voluptuous day
Which wrought the ruin of my lord the King.'

She said: they took her to themselves; and she
Still hoping, fearing 'Is it yet too late?'
Dwelt with them, till in time their Abbess died.
Then she, for her goods deeds and her pure life,
And for the power of ministration in her,
And likewise for the high rank she had borne,
Was chosen Abbess, there, an Abbess, lived
For three brief years, and there, an Abbess, past
To where beyond these voices there is peace.

III. MORTE D'ARTHUR.

Middle mere, middle of the lake; **hest**, behest, command; **cuisse**s thigh-pieces; **drops of onset**, drops of blood spilt in battle.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's table, man by man,
Had fall'n in Lyonesse about their Lord,
King Arthur: then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land.
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never-more, at any future time,

Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made,—
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more—but let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten through the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride : for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword—and how I row'd across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king :
And wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known :
But now delay not : take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere :
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word.'

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere :
' It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus.
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm.
A little thing may harm a wounded man.
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.'

So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zig-zag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt :
For all the haft twinkled with diamond studs,

Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled, as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw: but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
There in the many-knotted waterflags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded king.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere: '
'Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave?
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:
'Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight:
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
I bad thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud:

'And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done?

What harm, undone? deep harm to disobey,
 Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
 Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
 An act unprofitable, against himself?
 The king is sick, and knows not what he does.
 What record, or what relic of my lord
 Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
 And rumours of a doubt? but were this kept,
 Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
 Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
 Saying, "King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
 Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
 Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
 Upon the hidden bases of the hills."
 So might some old man speak in the aftertime
 To all the people, winning reverence.
 But now much honour and much fame were lost.'

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
 And hid Excalibur the second time.
 And so strode back slow to the wounded King.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily :
 'What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'
 And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
 'I heard the water lapping on the crag,
 And the long ripple washing in the reeds.'

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath :
 'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
 Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
 Laid widow'd of the power in his eye
 That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
 For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
 In whom should meet the offices of all,
 Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
 Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
 Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
 Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
 And the third time may prosper, get thee hence :

But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush-beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the northern sea.
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur :
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath :
' Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out : what is it thou hast heard, or seen? '

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere :
' Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him ;
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard :
' My end draws nigh ; 'tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin ; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.'

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear 'Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking as he walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thoughts drove like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these,
Three Queens with crowns of gold—and from them
rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind, that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, 'Place me in the barge,'
And to the barge they came. There those three
Queens

Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against his brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colourless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls—
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the daïs-throne—were parch'd with dust;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere,
'Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole ROUND TABLE is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world;
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge:
'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,

Lest one good custom should corrupt the world. }
Comfort thyself : what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within Himself make pure ! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest—if indeed I go—
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly, but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death, ~~and~~
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

MALORY

(1) The best edition of the "Morte d'Arthur" is that of Dr. O. Sommer (3 vols. £2 10s. David Nutt), which consists of an exact reproduction of Caxton's text and full critical apparatus.

The text can be obtained separately for 7s. 6d. nett.

Messrs. Dent have published in two different forms an edition of the "Morte d'Arthur" in modern spelling: the first is in the "Temple Classics" (4 vols. at 1s. 6d. nett each), the second in "Everyman's Library" (2 vols. at 1s. nett each).

A modernised version (edited by Sir Edward Strachey) is published by Messrs. Macmillan at 3s. 6d. (Globe Edition).

(2) In the series of "Popular Studies in Mythology, Romance, and Folklore" (David Nutt. 6d. each), there are some excellent little books on Arthurian romance. Of these No 1 ("Celtic and Mediæval Romance") and No. 4 ("King Arthur and his Knights") may be particularly recommended.

TENNYSON

The standard life of Tennyson is that by his son. It is published in one vol. by Messrs. Macmillan (10s. nett); or in two vols. (36s. nett).

The same firm also publish various editions of Tennyson's Works. The handiest is that at 7s. 6d. The Poetical Works alone can be obtained for 3s. 6d. (Globe Edition).

There are several short lives of Tennyson. Perhaps the best is that by Mr. Andrew Lang, published by Messrs. Blackwood & Sons (6d. paper covers; 2s. 6d. cloth).

